

THE LIFE AND THOUGHT OF JOHN BURROUGHS

by

Alice Virginia Bernhard
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Approved by:

Josephine M. Burnham
Instructor in charge.

W. S. Johnson
Chairman of Department.

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PREFACE

The purpose of this study is not to attempt any addition to the great, rich biography already given us by the literary executrix of John Burroughs. It is not an effort to analyze each of the many volumes of essays of his remarkably long and happy literary career. Rather, the study springs from my interest in Burroughs and a consequent desire to assemble in convenient and compact form for his friends (particularly the newer ones, who have not been privileged to follow his thought from year to year) the outstanding and significant events and influences of his life, together with the basic tenets of his thought and philosophy, emanating from his extensive research into the fields of nature, science, and religion. This excludes, naturally, his poetry, his literary criticism, and his descriptive nature essays, except insofar as they are incidentally related to some phase of his thought or development, or to some typical principle of his life.

John Burroughs has been widely recognized, both at home and abroad, as America's most outstanding and delightful nature essayist, as well as one whose fidelity to nature's truths may ever be relied upon. Many of his friends today recall with what pleasurable anticipations they opened a magazine containing one of his essays. First, mayhap, nature essays, embodying both Nature and Nature as she crossed the ways of man, tinged with a touch of philosophy upon the matters under

observation, lightened up with an occasional quaint flash of humor, and impregnated with a sane optimism that put them right with the world -- "the Cosmos." Later, more purely thoughtful, philosophical essays upon nature, science, and religion -- in Burroughs's view, a rational and inseparable sequence. It is the nature essays, published more or less continuously during the last four decades of the nineteenth century, and with less frequency during the two decades of his life in the twentieth century, which are the best known to the larger part of his readers. With the later essays, the product of the maturity of his genius, the essays carrying the heart of his philosophy of life, his earnest message to his generation, not all who love his descriptive nature essays are acquainted. It has been my hope that, in a small way, those who read this thesis may, if they have not heretofore been familiar with Burroughs's philosophical essays, find the brief presentation of his thought here given, an incentive to wider reading; that those who have known all of his work, may perchance find this a happy reminder of past enjoyment. If it reflect but a fraction of the pleasure and profit which the study has brought to me, the time spent in reading the thesis will be far from wasted.

I wish to thank, deeply and warmly, Professor Raphael D. O'Leary for first directing my attention to the possibilities in the philosophical essays of Burroughs. During an Investigation and Conference course in the summer of 1925, covering the nature writings of Dallas Lore Sharp, Enos A. Mills, John Muir,

and John Burroughs, Professor O'Leary, in his own way, terse, stimulating, thought-arresting, inspiring, suggested the desirability of extending one's acquaintance with Burroughs beyond the nature essays to his philosophical writing. Since that time I have read, and re-read, this great body of Burroughs's work -- his contribution to the thought of his day. I have also read more widely and systematically than previously in his nature essays and his literary criticism, so that I might bring to this thesis a reasonable understanding of the man Burroughs in his different capacities, as well as a knowledge of his development from the young writer of the early sixties to the master craftsman of later years. It has been well worth while. I have found a rich and gifted personality and a remarkably consistent thought development. I wish further to thank Professor O'Leary for his so kindly and generously lending me valuable books from his personal library, when it was impossible for me to obtain them elsewhere. I am indebted to other members of the English Graduate Committee for their thoughtful interest in my work, and I thank them heartily and sincerely. I wish also to thank the librarians of the University of Kansas for their courteous assistance to me in the procuring of books, data, and periodicals during the months of my study.

How shall I sufficiently thank Dr. Josephine Burnham for her gracious interest, friendly encouragement, and helpful suggestions during all stages of my study? Some debts can be

acknowledged, paid for, wiped out; others are of such a nature that no acknowledgment seems adequate. I cannot reimburse Doctor Burnham for her generous gift of time, thought, and advice to me in the preparation of this thesis. I can but express my deep appreciation and cherish memories of her unvarying kindness.

A. V. B.

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CHAPTER I

Life and Personality of John Burroughs

Life and Personality of John Burroughs

1

Approach to Burroughs

In one of the most delightful of the many appreciative essays and books, written in honor of John Burroughs, - naturalist, poet, critic, philosopher, - shortly following his death in 1921, we find this comment: 1"An actual visit with Burroughs seems almost necessary for the right approach to his books. Matter and manner, the virtues and faults of his writings, the very things he did not write about, are all explained in the presence of a man of eighty-three who brings home a woodchuck from the field for dinner, and saves its pelt for a winter coat."

People from all walks of life - perchance a simple country boy or girl, fired with a desire to write after reading one of Burroughs's nature essays, or a great man of genius, or a president of the United States - did in fact avail themselves of the hospitality of this simple, serene, wise, and kindly man, at some one of his rural homes, which, as we might expect, seem to partake of the nature of the owner, in their simplicity and lack of ostentation. One and all left his presence, refreshed and invigorated in body and spirit, feeling that they had

1. SHARP, The Seer of Slabsides, p.7.

met a friend.

To these delightful, personal associations, the hand of Time has written finis. To us who would now know John Burroughs, the approach must be through what he wrote and through the records and testimony of those who knew him best. Happily, there are living many friends, among whom are a few who "saw him plain," shared his confidence, and entered into his spirit. Burroughs, himself, tells us ²"My books are in a way, a record of my life - that part of it that came to flower and fruit in my mind. You could reconstruct my days pretty well from those volumes. A writer who gleans his literary harvest in the fields and woods reaps mainly where he has sown himself. He is a husbandman whose crop springs from the seed of his own heart." Nevertheless, to one who is unfamiliar with his life - the background of his "literary harvest" - there would be gaps to fill in between the books, circumstances of his life, which, if known, would add greatly to an appreciation of the man and his thought. It is for this reason that we, preliminary to a more systematic study of certain aspects of his thought and philosophy, consider, somewhat briefly, the essential facts of his life: his ancestry, his environment, his education, his habits, ideals, and attitudes, his achievements, his friends, his literary background in general, and the particular authors who wielded a more significant and direct influence in shaping and developing the genius of the man whose writings have delighted the hearts of many and revealed to them a

2. BURROUGHS, JOHN, My Boyhood, pp. 4-5.

new world.

2

The Ancestry of John Burroughs

In opening the book of life of John Burroughs, if one expects to find a full explanation of his genius in his ancestry, he is doomed to disappointment. Here is no Emerson, with a long line of professional men behind him. Rather, a long line of farmer folk and woodsmen - another example of the genius of America! The same century which produced the immortal Lincoln, twenty-eight years later brought forth John Burroughs, and in the self-same year in which it gave William Dean Howells to the world. The genius of America: three men, great in three distinct fields, all springing from humble life.

³"John Burroughs was born in an unpainted, weather-worn farmhouse nestling in the lap of the hills above the village of Roxbury, Delaware County, New York, on April 3, 1837. He was the seventh child of Chauncey A. Burroughs, whose parents and grandparents moved into that locality from Connecticut about 1776, and of Amy Kelly Burroughs, whose father was a soldier of the Revolution." He had five brothers and four sisters, all of whom remained simple, unlettered country people, with scarcely any appreciation of their brother's aspirations and attainments, but to all of whom he was ever deeply attached.

3. Life and Letters, V. I, p.1.

The first Burroughs (and his name was John) of whom we have any record in the United States, came from the West Indies, settling in Connecticut about 1690, and marrying Patience Hinman in 1694. One of their grandsons, Ephraim Burroughs, born in 1740, was the great-grandfather of the naturalist. Another grandson, Stephen Burroughs, great-great uncle of our John Burroughs, born in 1729, achieved distinction as a mathematician and astronomer and devised the system of Federal money adopted by the United States in 1790. Prior to the time of John Burroughs, there is record of but two more men by the name of Burroughs who were outstandingly connected with anything but rural pursuits: A Reverend George Burroughs (collateral line), a Harvard graduate, who was hanged in 1692, for witchcraft in Salem; and a cousin of John Burroughs's father, a Dr. John C. Burroughs, a graduate of Yale, who became the first president of the first Chicago University. In the Journal of John Burroughs, July 26, 1888, we find an entry of this Dr. Burroughs's visiting at Riverby.

³"Immensely tickled to see him - a man to love and follow."

And later, in 1892, on receiving word of his death, Burroughs expresses his love in another entry: ⁴"One of the few men I have known, of whom I have felt, 'He has walked with Christ' - so simple, sincere, gentle, charitable, and brotherly . . . a man whom all persons liked or loved."

Since these three are the only ones bearing the name, who achieved distinction prior to John Burroughs,

3. Life and Letters, V. I, p. 300.

4. Ibid., p. 327.

and since two of them were but remotely related and the other but a second cousin to the author, it becomes evident why Burroughs writes, ⁵"I am the son of a farmer, as was my father, and his. There is no break, so far as I know, in the line of farmers, back to the seventeenth century."

This observation was made when Burroughs was trying, at the suggestion of a friend, to account for his life and aspirations being so different from those of his brothers and sisters. Continuing his self-analysis, Burroughs states that he has always looked upon himself as a sport. ⁶"I came out of the air as well as from my family." His father's people, he avers, were mediocre, non-aggressive farmers, without sufficient ability and self-assertion for great worldly success; nor were any of them men of letters. He traces his ⁷"many weaknesses and insufficiencies" to his father's people, but finds no trace of his intellectual "qualities". In his immediate forbears, he finds "no scholars or thinkers or lovers of books . . . all obscure farmers, rather grave, law-abiding, religiously-inclined men; sober, industrious, good citizens and neighbors . . . but with no very shining qualities." In another place, he finds them ⁸"rather retiring, peace-loving, solitude-loving men - men not strongly sketched on the camera of life." These fundamental traits, however, he values,

5. Our Friend John Burroughs, p 46.

6. Ibid., p. 109.

7. Ibid., p. 110.

8. Ibid., p 114.

saying that his "intellectual impetus" came from the Burroughs side of the family.

Basic virtues of good citizenship, however admirable, will not produce poets, nature writers, and philosophers. Hence Burroughs, not wishing apparently to throw the whole burden of his mental qualities on the theory of variation from family type, turns to his mother's people, the Kellys, Celts of Irish extraction. ⁹"I owe to my mother, he writes, "my temperament, my love of nature, my brooding, introspective habit of mind - all those things which in a literary man help to give atmosphere to his work. In her line were dreamers and fishermen and hunters. . . . The Celtic element, which I get mostly from her side, no doubt played an important part in my life. My idealism, my romantic tendencies, are largely her gift." On another page he adds that he has his mother's ¹⁰"subdued and neutral tones, her curiosity, her love of animals, and of wild nature generally."

We see in this analysis of the two sides of Burroughs's ancestry much to predict the man Burroughs that the world knows. But inasmuch as he had nine brothers and sisters, none of whom felt the spur to higher accomplishment, none of whom felt the magic of the world of books or the affinity for nature with which Burroughs was so richly endowed, none of whom ever read one of his brother's books,

9. Our Friend John Burroughs, p. 65.

10. Ibid., p. 115.

we admit some justification for Burroughs's assumption that he was a "sport". True, Burroughs may have overlooked an important factor, the great similarity in spirit and personality between himself and his father's second cousin,¹¹ Dr. Burroughs of Chicago; for what he wrote of Dr.

Burroughs might have been written of John Burroughs, as well. And who can define the limits or the workings of the laws of heredity, despite all that has been discovered thereon? Was there an impulse - recessive - toward a higher life, which, skipping several generations in one branch of the Burroughs family, became dominant in one child only, in this big family of boys and girls; descended dominantly on this one favored child? Accepting for what value we may, all that Burroughs received, directly or indirectly, from near or remote branches of his paternal and maternal ancestry, we still feel the existence of an intangible force, which we call genius, blossoming in the heart of this farmer boy. One of Burroughs's friends, has made the observation that Burroughs's achievements were¹² "due to the driving power of what we call 'genius,' the inexplicable urge which at that same time was filling the heart of William Dean Howells, a barefooted printer's boy standing at his case in a small Ohio town."

11. This study, p 7.

12. GARLAND, The Century, Sept., 1921, p. 731.

3.

Influence of His Youthful Environment.

If we have found it difficult to estimate what Burroughs owes to his ancestry and what to the gift of genius, we shall experience less trouble in considering the influence of his youthful environment upon his developing mind and nature. All agree that his writings are stamped with the poetic tang of the woods, the savor of the soil, and a deep joy in rural things; where shall we find the source of this if not in his boyhood experiences? The Burroughs homestead of three hundred and twenty acres lay in the picturesque region along the east branch of the Delaware, the Pepacton River, high up in the Catskills, at an altitude of two thousand feet. ¹³"His environment," says his literary executrix, "clothed him as a mantle. It stamped itself upon his soul. Peculiarly fluid and impressionable, his psychology, and consequently his style, seem literally to have been shaped by the long flowing lines of the hills upon which he looked as a child, by the wide valleys, the wooded heights, the mountain streams. Their counterpart is found upon his page. Nothing in his writing is broken or abrupt; his sentences flow with the same large simplicity as do the lines of his native landscape; seem as spontaneous as the springs; yield the quiet and privacy of the woods."

13. Life and Letters, V. I, p. 3.

On this Burroughs farm, there was much work, with play limited to holidays and Sundays. The family made their farm sustain life in a way we today find almost impossible to imagine. There were dairying, haying, growing and harvesting of grains, vegetables, and fruits. They literally lived on the products of the farm, even to the growing of flax for their clothing. Burroughs describes the ¹⁴"shives," which, interwoven in the homemade cloth, converted the wearer into "an unwilling penitent for weeks." "But the cloth was strong," he adds.

Of all the work of the farm, Burroughs liked best to be sent strawberrying, raspberrying, or fishing, by his mother, work which was a kind of adventure and contained an element of play. ¹⁵"Buckling down to any sort of routine" galled him as a boy and as a man, he tells us. He liked sugar-making, which brought him near to wild nature. He watched the maple grove, ¹⁶"anticipating the general tapping by a few days on his own account along the sunny border of the woods, . . . boiling the sap down on the kitchen stove and selling the sugar in the village." His first algebra and ^{first} grammar, he purchased with some of this precious money.

These fishing and berrying expeditions, together with the long tramps in the woods, which he was permitted to take on Sundays and holidays, were undoubtedly vital

14. My Boyhood, pp. 60-65,

15. Our Friend John Burroughs, p. 75.

16. Ibid., p. 76.

elements in the evolution of a naturalist and philosopher from the normal, active, vigorous farmboy, not materially different from other boys of his age except in the possession of one gift: he noticed things about him more than did his companions, and reflected, with increasing wonder, upon them. Not that he was consciously a nature lover or given to deeply serious thought as a young boy. Far from it. His development might be compared to that portrayed by the poet he loved later on. First, the thoughtless boy, bounding

" . . . o'er the mountains, by the sides
Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams,
Wherever nature led - . . ."

Then, the

" . . . glad animal movements all gone by,"

he experienced aesthetic pleasure.

" . . . The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion; . . ."

And much later in life came the philosophical phase, when nature was a solace and a revelation of a hidden power in the universe.

Burroughs relates in later life some of these early experiences of ¹⁷"exalted emotional states," which came all unexpectedly to him as a boy. Once, walking along the top of a stone wall, but partially conscious of the beauty about him, he felt a strange joy and exultation. "I flourished a root of a tree, shaped like a pistol. . . shouted and exulted and let my emotion have full swing . . . It was a moment of supreme happiness. . . . I was literally intoxicated with - I know not what. I only remember that

17. Our Friend John Burroughs, p. 122.

life seemed amazingly beautiful." And so life was ever to seem to him. This same spirit of thrilling to something wonderful in nature - he knew not what - remained with him to the last day of his life. It was a part of his religion. And never was he to forget the varied experiences in work on the farm, and in his tramps in the woods, over the mountains, by the streams, listening and watching for birds, adding, little by little, to his nature lore. When he began writing in his twenty-fifth year, he had only, he later tells us, to unpack the memories of that farm boy.

18 "I had absorbed the knowledge that gave life and warmth to my page. Take that farm boy out of my books, and you have robbed them of something vital and fundamental. You have taken from the soil much of its fertility."

4

The Education of Burroughs

The sustaining of life for a large family, so completely as was done on the Burroughs farm, meant long hours of work on the part of every member of the family. Up to the age of eleven, each child attended all sessions of the rural schools; thereafter, schooling was confined to the short winter terms. If one be given the instinct for books, however, in the degree to which Burroughs possessed it, no lack of formal education, no lack of family interest,

can suppress his dominant craving. Burroughs read very early all that he could lay hands upon; and, by a happy chance, the books, though heavy for one so young, led him into association with the "best thoughts of the best minds." Curiously, one of the ¹⁹"exalted emotional states," which we have noted, came to him as a boy of seven, occasioned by the reading of a passage from the Life of Washington. I believe that bespeaks, of itself, the caliber of his mind and the quality of his aspirations.

Up to the age of seventeen, Burroughs attended the district schools at home. He had worked early and late on the farm that summer and fall of his sixteenth year, hoping to attend Harpersfield Seminary in the winter. The mother, supplementing his pleading, had wrung a partial consent from the father. ²⁰"Day after day, on the side-hill lot, he cross-ploughed the ground for the rye, the plough handles jerking him about, but his head high in the clouds - visions of books and classmates and academic halls hovering over the heads of Prince and Pete, with Harpersfield at the end of every furrow." With the coming of winter, however, the expense looked too big to his father. Besides, he argued, the other boys had not gone away; why should John go?

In justice to Farmer Burroughs, it must be admitted that he had not then, and never did have, any

19. Here, p. 16.

20. Life and Letters, V. I, p. 29.

understanding of his son's nature and needs. He was giving his son the same education he and his other children had received. In his own youth, Chauncey Burroughs had received a fair schooling for the times and had taught school two winters. His life-long reading consisted of the Bible, a hymn book, his weekly secular paper, and a monthly religious paper. Anything beyond this was nonessential and dangerous in its tendency, leading, all too frequently, to the Methodist ministry. Since he and his people were primitive Baptists, believers in predestination, no fate could be worse than for his son to be drawn into the Methodist fold. Far be it from him to assist in so great a calamity.

Burroughs swallowed his bitter disappointment as well as he could. In later years, he spoke of it with generosity. His father felt that he was an "odd one," and that he had tendencies and tastes that must not be sympathized with. 21 "He never alluded to my literary work," wrote Burroughs; "apparently left it out of his estimate of me. My aims and aspirations were a sealed book to him, as his peculiar religious experiences were to me; yet I reckon it was the same leaven working in us both. Father experienced religion, and I experienced Nature."

His cherished dream denied fulfillment, Burroughs attended the district school one more winter, in preparation for teaching. This decade in his life, from 1854 to 1863,

he describes as "Obscure, of which little need be said."

²²"I was reading and thinking and trying to get hold of myself I suppose I was growing all the time." Growth was the significant thing. Yet, there were a few important outward events, some of which influenced his whole future life: teaching a part of every year; marrying early in the period; working on his father's farm in the summers; reading and studying whenever a few spare minutes might be seized; and perhaps best of all, two precious seasons of academic work. He attended the Hedding Literary Institute at Ashland, New York, from October to May, 1854, and the Cooperstown Seminary from April to the end of July, 1856, paying for the schooling from his carefully-saved teacher's salary. At the first academy, he studied algebra, geometry, chemistry, French, logic, and composition. The instructors, or the student, or both, must assuredly have been superior. They "parsed" Milton; and in Burroughs's reaction to the theology therein, we see a hint of the questioning, developing mind of the youth and of its future character. ²³"I was shocked and astonished by that celestial warfare. I told one of my classmates I did not believe a word of it." At Cooperstown, he ²⁴"began Latin and English literature and continued French and mathematics. He outranked his fellows in composition and debated in the Websterian Society."

With these two terms of academic work, Burroughs's formal education came to an end. However, there was a

22. Life and Letters, V. I, p. 31.

23. Our Friend John Burroughs, p. 98.

24. Life and Letters, V. I, p. 40.

valuable beginning in culture through languages and literature, as well as training in straight thinking, induced by his study of mathematics, logic, and debating. Either the working habits formed were superior, effective, and far-reaching, or in Burroughs we have a rare instance of the triumph of innate ability and persistency. For who can read a chapter, chosen at random from almost any of his books, without feeling the charm of his writing, the depth of his wisdom, and the breadth of his knowledge?

5

His Marriage and Its Influence

The catastrophe which, once for all, made impossible any further formal education was his unfortunate and early marriage in the fall of 1857. If a young man, aspiring and poor, were but love-proof, how different might be his life. Burroughs runs true to form in love, however, if not in other ancestral traits. While teaching school in Tongore, he fell captive to the charms of Miss Ursula North, a daughter of practical, hard-working, acquisitive farming people. Beautiful, unimaginative, over-practical, ambitious for worldly possessions, with a temper never brought under control, older than Burroughs, what chance had Ursula North for happiness with a youth whose ideals and ambitions were not for worldly wealth, but for aesthetic wealth? As for John, poor, struggling, peace-loving, idealistic, sensitive, immature, - he had no chance at all. But they married.

It is not the purpose of this paper to trace the marital troubles of John and Ursula Burroughs. Rather, we shall consider this marriage merely as it adversely affected the literary career of John Burroughs. If any marriage ever illustrated the basic necessity of the triple union of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual sides of our natures, this one did by its lack of harmony in the two latter aspects, the mental and the spiritual. As we read certain pages of the letters and Journal of Burroughs, we feel that an enemy bent on destruction could not have made his life and intellectual advancement more difficult. In other entries, we find an apparent companionship that suggests contentment and happiness, which still another entry reveals as but transient happiness, based on material comforts.

A few excerpts from letters and Journals will show the disastrous effect on Burroughs's writing of the diverse standards of husband and wife regarding the real values of life, and of their irreconcilable points of view relative to his ambition to become a writer. One of the saddest entries was in 1860, when they had been married but three years. Burroughs, poor, teaching by day, studying and writing at night, - in his apprenticeship period - had succeeded in getting an essay accepted by the "Atlantic." Telling of his joy and strengthened ambition, in later life, he said: ²⁵"I was so set up by it that I wanted to go in the

little parlor by myself and write on another piece I had begun - Analogy; but Mrs. Burroughs thought it a desecration to use that precious parlor for 'scribbling.' When I insisted, she locked the door." This, an insult to his writing, made Burroughs, usually patient, so indignant that he burst open the door, only to find the clash of temperaments had upset him too much for writing. ²⁶"The sap did not run. ... Poor Analogy had a set-back that day that it was hard to recover from."

Other entries in his Journal show how the excessive zeal of the housewife and her brutal frankness annoyed him and interfered with his writing. ²⁷"The situation," he writes, "is all the more pathetic to deal with because all her faults are virtues perverted or pushed too far. Her terrible cleanliness, her ceaseless war upon dust and dirt - what a virtue back of it! Her thrift - wearing out herself and others to save her things - what virtue is there perverted! Her brutal frankness springs from a trait we all admire - truthfulness, sincerity; but when she calls you a liar without provocation or because you differ from her, it is too much of a good thing. She hates deception to the point of discarding all the disguises and half-tones of life - nothing but the bare, ugly prose left - no charm, no illusion, no romance. ... One supreme want she has, to which she sacrifices everything - health, hospitality, friends, husband, child, - the want to be free from dirt and disorder. She is one of

26. Life and Letters, V. I, p. 55.

27. Ibid., p. 330.

those terrible housekeepers with whom there is no living - a housekeeper, but not a homemaker."

Burroughs's son Julian agrees with his father about their domestic trouble. ²⁸"Mother was a materialist; she never rated literary effort very high; she seemed to think that Father should do the work of the hired man and then do his writing nights and holidays. She saw no sense in 'scribbling', and her view did not soften until Father had a steady income from his books. ... She was a 'too-good' housekeeper, often driving her husband out of his library, and his thread was rudely broken; it was a day when, as he would say, sap did not run."

Another entry by Burroughs shows the wife's inexplicable lack of pride in her husband's accomplishments. ²⁹"You couldn't find a book of my writing in that house. They are never mentioned there. She has no pride in them. She refuses to see people who come to see me - the people whom my writings draw. She looks upon writing as a kind of self-indulgence which she ought to frown upon."

As late as 1885, when, to others, Burroughs's literary career was assured, when he had already given to the world six delightful nature books, but before he had entered upon his scientific and philosophical writing, Mrs. Burroughs stormed at her husband to give all his time to the fruit farm. A short journal entry comments on this fact. ³⁰"Mrs.

28. My Boyhood, pp. 158-9, passim.

29. Life and Letters, V. I, p. 331.

30. Life and Letters, V. I, p. 90.

B. advises me to give up writing and do something else for a living. She advises me in the same spirit that the wife of a cobbler, or a carpenter, might advise her husband to give up his trade and try some other."

Fortunately for lovers of Burroughs, together with his sensitive and peace-loving nature, he had also a strain of dogged perseverance. Once convinced of the rightness of his position, he could not be swerved therefrom. As early as 1864, he evidently had thought the matter through and determined finally on the long, uphill struggle toward authorship-self-expression. During a separation at that time, while he was seeking employment in Washington, he wrote his wife as follows: ³¹"I see my way clearly ... If you can take me as I am ... faults and all ... and when you can't approve, say nothing, things will go smooth enough. Only let me alone and give me love. I expect to hoe my row alone, to cipher out my own problems. I do not complain. I do not ask help. I want only sympathy; but if you cannot give me that, you can let me alone."

She could not give him sympathy, and she never could let him alone; but despite the antagonistic and irreconcilable qualities in the minds and characters of John and Ursula Burroughs, there was still, oddly, a genuine attachment which held them together until the death of Mrs. Burroughs March 6, 1917. A reader of his life rejoices that he had a few years

31. Life and Letters, V. I, p. 90.

of uncensored peace. He writes in his Journal on learning of the seriousness of her last illness: ³²"I am more depressed than I thought I could be. Oh, it is so pitiful! ... So little, she has got out of life, when there is so much!" After her death, he writes: ³³"I think of all her good traits, and the many ways in which she served me so faithfully ... She did the best she could. She did not snare my life because she was not thus made."

6

The Influence of John Burroughs's Homes

By nature, Burroughs was a great home-lover. However slow in the amassing of worldly goods the Burroughs family had been, they held their own homestead farms for generations. During the decade from 1864 to 1873, Burroughs served as a clerk in the Treasury Department in Washington. With his thrifty wife - for in material things she was a true helpmate - he was soon able to have his own house, garden, and cow, this cow, by the way, being the subject of one of his amusing nature essays, "Our Rural Divinity." While in Washington, the restrictions of his homelife interfered less with his writing than at any other time, since he had several hours of leisure in the Treasury Department each day which he devoted to studying and writing.

At the end of the Washington period, Burroughs built what we may call his conventional home. Serving as a

32. Ibid., V. II, p. 245.

33. Life and Letters, V. II, p. 245.

special United States Bank examiner for some years following his Washington life, he looked about in his travels for a home which would be near enough town to satisfy his wife, and yet give him a taste of rural life and solitude for thinking and writing during the intervals of bank examining. He finally decided upon a nine-acre tract of land suitable for grapes and small fruits, at West Park, Ulster County, New York, eighty miles from New York City. In 1874, they built their house of native stone and timber and planted a vineyard; from that time on, Burroughs successfully combined the business of grape-culture with literary pursuits. This home they called Riverby (short sound of y) because its grounds sloped down to the beautiful Hudson River. With the vineyard to satisfy his affinity for the soil and guarantee an income to maintain his home, he was during the rest of his life increasingly able to devote time to his writing - the work of his heart and spirit.

But all was not smooth sailing at Riverby, as Julian testifies. His father had intended to have his study at Riverby on the third floor and had taken great pleasure in fitting it up in natural woods, and in anticipating long, peaceful hours of writing. ... But the "perfect housekeeper" caused him to build ³⁴"the bark-covered study down on the edge of the bank; then a few years later yet, he built Slabsides, two miles over the low mountain. It was there ... that he did the bulk of his literary work."

34. My Boyhood, pp. 57-58.

In commenting on Slabsides, Dr. Barrus remarked that in his essay, ³⁵"Roof-Tree", Burroughs said a man makes public proclamation of what are his tastes and his manners, or his want of them, when he builds his house; that if we can only keep our pride and vanity in abeyance and forget that all the world is looking on, we may be reasonably sure of having a beautiful house. "Tried by his own test," she continues, "he has no reason to be ashamed of his taste or his manners when Slabsides is critically examined. Blending with its surroundings, it is coarse, strong, and substantial without; within, it is snug and comfortable; its wide door bespeaks hospitality; its low, broad roof, protection and shelter; its capacious hearth, cheer; all its appointments for the bodily needs express simplicity and frugality; and its books and magazines, and the conversation of the host - are they not there for the needs that bread alone will not satisfy?"

Burroughs, himself, said that ³⁶"as the bird feathers her nest with down plucked from her own breast, so one's spirit must shed itself upon its environment before it can brood and be at all content." We know that his brooding and contentment at Slabsides was reflected richly in his writings. In justification of its homely name, Burroughs protested to his friends who advised a more euphonious and poetic one, ³⁷"The name just expresses the place, and the

35. Our Friend John Burroughs, p. 32.

36. Ibid., p. 28.

37. Ibid., p. 20.

place meets the want that I feel for something simple, homely, secluded - something with the bark on."

Despite his love of solitude in which to brood and work, Burroughs loved friends. His readers, of all conditions and ages, climbed the hill to the rustic cottage. There they ³⁸"have seen more than the picturesque retreat of a living author; they have received a salutary impression made by the unostentatious life of a man who has made a profound impression on his day and age."

But while the mountain home high on the hills that overlooked the Hudson brought Burroughs, for many years, such peace as he had never known before, his heart yearned for his boyhood environment. Every year, on some pretext or other, he would steal up to Delaware County on the Pepacton for a visit with the birds, or to boil sap, or fish for trout, hunt wild honey, or gather wild strawberries. At last, in the summer of 1908, Burroughs purchased an old, two-story dwelling which stood on a farm one-half mile from the Burroughs homestead, remodeled it, and called it Woodchuck Lodge in honor of the little forest neighbors of that name, which infested his woods. From that time until his death on March 29, 1921, his summers were spent at Woodchuck Lodge, where he enjoyed, possibly in greater measure because of its proximity to his boyhood home, the same delightful serenity and peace that reigned at Slabsides. Here, too, came many visitors - strangers and friends; but they were all friends when they left.

38. Our Friend John Burroughs, p. 9.

I venture to include one more excerpt, which, it seems to me, shows much of the man Burroughs and the spirit which drew people from all over the country to him. This was written of him in 1914. ³⁹"In the comfort of the hills among which his life began, with his friends around him, he rejoices in the ever-changing face of Nature, enjoys the fruits of his garden, his forenoons of work, and the afternoons when friends from far and near walk across the fields, or drive, or motor, up to Woodchuck Lodge; and best of all, he enjoys the peace which evening brings - those late afternoon hours when the shadow of Old Clump is thrown on the broad mountain-slope across the valley, and when the long, silvery notes of the vesper sparrow chant 'Peace, goodwill, and then goodnight!' As the shadows deepen, he is wont to carry his Victor out to the stone wall and let the music from Brahm's Cradle Song or Schubert's Serenade float to us as we sit on the veranda, hushed into humble gratitude for our share in this quiet life."

7

The Influence of Certain Authors

It is not only those who are nearest his life, not only houses and lands and the atmosphere thereof, which assisted or retarded the development of John Burroughs; but also there is an influence, strong and vital, which emanated from certain well-known authors and contemporaries. How great it was cannot be estimated. Burroughs acknowledged

39. BARRUS, Our Friend John Burroughs, p. 201.

his debt over and over. Shortly before his death, he handed a list of names to his official biographer, remarking:

40"Emerson in his old age made a list of names of men whom he called 'My Men'. Here is a list of my men - that is, of men to whom I feel under obligation - men who have helped me to find myself; Wordsworth, Arnold, Carlyle, Tyndall, Huxley, Darwin, in England. Emerson, Whitman, Thoreau, and, in a minor way, Muir, in this country. The men to whom I am indebted for entertainment and knowledge is (sic) legion."

Dr. Barrus comments that at no other time has she known Burroughs to name either Thoreau or Mr. Muir in this connection. From rather a wide and careful reading of the writing of John Burroughs, I am of the opinion that his literary executrix is right and that Thoreau and Muir should not be included in the list of authors who strongly and positively influenced him.

Emerson was the first great influence upon the thought and style of Burroughs. His first contact with Emerson's essays was during his short attendance at Coopers-town Seminary in 1856. For a year prior to this time, he had been living with Johnson. 41"From the sententiousness of Johnson he swung away, to come under the spell of Addison and Lamb ... Saint Pierre's Studies of Nature set ajar a door that Emerson flung wide open." 42"I read him (Emerson) in a sort of ecstasy. I got him in my blood, and he colored

40. Life and Letters, V. II, p. 408.

41. Ibid., V. 1, p. 41.

42. Ibid.

my whole intellectual outlook. He appealed to my spiritual side; his boldness and unconventionality took a deep hold upon me." At this time Burroughs was ⁴³"already keenly alive to the sensuous enjoyment of nature; under Emerson's guidance he went out of doors with a consciousness awakened to the subtler shades of beauty and to the deeper meaning behind facts ... The awareness of his unity with nature, which Emerson helped to bring about, grew with his growth."

Burroughs acknowledged also the literary influence of Emerson.

⁴⁴"My debt to Emerson is great; he helped me to a better literary expression, he quickened my perception of the beautiful, he stimulated and fertilized my religious nature."

Not in every point, however, did Burroughs agree with Emerson. In certain aspects of their philosophy they were far apart. Emerson was an ⁴⁵"intuitionist," while Burroughs was a rationalist. Emerson looked within, while Burroughs looked to the laws in the physical universe as attested by reason. Furthermore, as Burroughs matured and "found himself," his early blind worship was tempered with a more critical spirit. He continued to give Emerson a high place in American letters, to regard him as a writer who can never suffer eclipse. He nevertheless evaluated certain qualities in the man and his writing which he considered open to criticism. Emerson, Burroughs set forth in one of his essays, was ⁴⁶too condensed; lacked breadth; was

43. Life and Letters, V. I, p. 41.

44. KENNEDY, The Real John Burroughs, p. 7.

45. MCQUISTON, The Relation of Emerson to Public Affairs, p. 4.

46. Birds and Poets, pp. 159-184.

deficient in sympathy and humor; was guilty of over-refinement and excess of culture; was a priest - a selector and refiner, rather than a creator like Shakespeare.

Despite this seemingly harsh criticism of the man whom he revered and to whom he felt immeasurably indebted, Burroughs grieved greatly at his death in 1882. He sent a tribute to the "Critic", from which these lines are taken:
47 "It is a rare privilege to have lived upon the earth at the same time with such a man as Emerson - to have seen the perfect flowering of the New England race and culture, after a century or more of preparation. As one of his younger contemporaries, my life has been most fortunate, and I owe him a debt that no words of mine can adequately measure."

Greater perhaps than Emerson's influence was that of Walt Whitman. In comparing the two men toward the end of his life, Burroughs said he revered them 48 "in a different way - Emerson was more astral - more like a star toward which I gazed. Walt, with all his cosmic qualities, was a comrade."

It was in the fall of 1863, in Washington, that they first met. Burroughs had been reading Leaves of Grass for two years previous to this, taking it with him on his tramps across the hills and by the streams. In his first dip into the volume, which he did not entirely understand, he recognized a love of the spiritual in nature and a
49 "quality akin to a fine sunrise or to a dim old hemlock

47. Life and Letters, p. 236.

48. Ibid., V. II, p. 379.

49. Ibid., V. I, p. 118.

forest." This common love of nature and common ability to discern the spiritual meaning of things drew the two, otherwise so diverse, together, - the young, inexperienced writer of twenty-six, and the more confident, mature poet of forty-four. ⁵⁰"They enjoyed together the lectures of a learned astronomer,...and, gliding out into the mystical night air, equally enjoyed gazing in perfect silence at the stars." They met two or three times a week over a mug of ale or a peck of oysters. Burroughs wrote to a friend that Walt's talk was often so rich and suggestive that it set every feeling in him on the alert. "He is the wisest man I ever met. There is nothing to be said after he gives his views; it is as if Nature herself had spoken. And so kind, sympathetic, charitable, humane, tolerant a man, I did not suppose was possible."

Throughout these years of enriching comradeship, Whitman was leading Burroughs to a realization of his own powers and encouraging him in self-expression, thus hastening his development inestimably. On one occasion, Burroughs tried to express to Whitman how "by some indirection" he was "helped by his knowledge of the birds, the animals, the cows, and common objects." ⁵¹"He could see, Walt said. The ancients had an axiom that he who knew one truth, knew all truths. There are so many ways by which Nature may be come at, so many sides to her, whether by bird, or insect, or flower, or

50. Life and Letters, V. I, p. 110.

51. *ibid.*, V. I, p. 111.

hunting, or science. When one thing is known, you can no longer be deceived." Through such conversations as this, Burroughs's concept of the unity of nature was deepened. Commenting on their relationship during the ten years in Washington, Burroughs said that he loved Whitman as he had never loved any other man; that he owed more to him than to any other man in the world. ⁵²"He brooded me; he gave me things to think of; he taught me generosity, breadth, and an all-embracing charity. He was a tremendous force in my life."

After Burroughs moved away from Washington and matured in mind and craftsmanship, there came gradually a change in the attitude of the two friends. They never grew less friendly; but when they met, it was more on equal terms than as master and pupil. On occasions Whitman deferred to Burroughs's opinion, while Burroughs always revered Whitman as the poet of the Cosmos.

For thirty years, until Whitman's death in 1892, this rare companionship continued. Burroughs was never done with Whitman anymore than with the birds. ⁵³"He was firmly convinced that in Walt Whitman America was superbly illustrated; in him Democracy was embodied; while in his poetry both were grandly uttered." His first book, published at his own expense, was on Whitman. In the last chapter of his last book to be published during his lifetime, he wrote his

52. Life and Letters, V. I, p. 113.

53. Ibid., V. I, p. 119.

third and final paper on Whitman. In it, he again presented Whitman as the ⁵⁴"one poet of the Cosmos ... his mind, his sympathies, sweep through a wider orbit than those of any other. I am bold enough to say frankly that I look upon him, not as the greatest intellect, but the most symbolic man, the greatest incarnation of mind, heart, and soul, fused and fired by the poetic spirit, that has appeared in the world during the Christian era."

In but one respect did Whitman fail to impress himself upon Burroughs, namely, in his views on future life. Whitman, in his ⁵⁵poetry, "by his own creative imagination," anticipated many of the tenets of Darwin and Huxley but still adhered to the orthodox belief in personal immortality. In bidding Burroughs his last farewell, he said, ⁵⁶"It's all right, John; it's all right," ... "But," commented Burroughs afterwards, "Whitman had the active, sustaining faith of immortality."

The influence of the remaining names on the list of "my men" may not be so readily discernible as that of Emerson and Whitman, but each man vitally touched Burroughs in some peculiarly individual way. In the poetry of Wordsworth, Burroughs found a kindred note, - the unity of nature, the beneficent, all-pervading spirit which he believed in. ⁵⁷"No other English poet ever touched me quite so closely as

54. Accepting the Universe, p. 316.

55. Summit of the Years, p. 58.

56. Our Friend John Burroughs, p. 316.

57. *ibid.*, p. 220.

Wordsworth." Again, ⁵⁸"Wordsworth wrote out of the spirit of his natural religion, not out of his orthodoxy or unnatural religion." In "Random Criticisms", Burroughs remarked:

⁵⁹"Wordsworth was in many ways a man after my own heart. He had the religious sentiment and the sense of the mystery of things - prosy at times, at others divine." Quoting from his "immortal ode,"

"The cataracts blow their trumpets from the steep," Burroughs agreed with Emerson that it was "the high water mark of English literature ... a great line," adding, "Wordsworth at his best - his inevitableness. His poems are like a product of Nature - they grew."

Carlyle, as well as Wordsworth, influenced the spiritual development of Burroughs. Long a reader of his books, he had the pleasure, in company with his friend Conway, of meeting Carlyle on his first trip to England in 1871.

⁶⁰"The great man was in a very pleasant, genial mood and delighted us for over two hours with his rich and eloquent talk. It was a memorable night for me," commented Burroughs in a letter to his wife. Time and time again, he spoke of Carlyle as a "great man," admiring intensely his ⁶¹"fearlessness, his heroic quality, and his moral fibre." ⁶²"Carlyle," he confided to his Journal, is a writer who "penetrates to the spirit ... and addresses the soul."

58. The Light of Day, p. 193.

59. Life and Letters, V. II, p. 343.

60. Ibid., V. I, p. 149.

61. Ibid., V. I, p. 266.

62. Ibid., V. I, p. 277.

63 "The great epoch-making Origin of Species and the Descent of Man," writes Dr. Barrus, "had an incalculable bearing upon his mental development. ... Tyndall, Huxley, and Spencer were also conspicuous developmental factors." Burroughs read the works of all these men, especially Darwin and Huxley, at frequent intervals during his life. As early as 64 1861, in his essay, "Analogy," we find him accepting "Darwin's hypothesis of the derivation of species." In 65 1882, he writes in his Journal that he has "nearly all of Darwin's works;" and in 1883, he is still "reading Darwin with avidity." He esteemed highly Darwin's instinct for truth, which he regarded as a basic quality, not only for a scientist but for any scholar or thinker. While finding intellectual stimulus and food in all Darwin's writing, he cared most for his Voyage of a Naturalist, as the following from "Random Criticisms" will show: 66 "Darwin's chief contribution is that he taught us to think of the organic world in terms of evolution. The character of the man, his candor, his sincerity, his love of truth, and his example of patient, tireless inquiry, are a precious heritage to all mankind. His record of his travels in the Beagle will probably outlast all his other books."

The influence which Arnold exerted over Burroughs was both spiritual and intellectual in its nature. He saw in his writings clarity of thinking and keen discernment in criticism. 67 "Arnold's mind," he affirmed, "was a wonderfully

63. Life and Letters, V. II, p. 3.

64. Ibid., V. I, p. 57.

65. Ibid., V. I, p. 233.

66. Ibid., V. II, p. 357.

67. Ibid., V. II, p. 348.

lucid one. There was the least confusion in his head of any man of his time." Again, ⁶⁸"I look upon Arnold as the greatest critic of English literature. Such steadiness, directness, sureness of aim and elevation, we have not seen before." In true spirituality, Burroughs found Arnold to be not lacking. He classed him with Wordsworth, Emerson, and Carlyle as ⁶⁹"essentially religious, men who reach and move the spirit and help forward the higher life; less than the men named in some respects, but superior in others - superior to any of them in clearness of vision, in power to see things exactly as they are."

8

Influence of Other Authors, Friends, and Great Men

As has been suggested above, the influence of Thoreau and John Muir is not to be compared with that of the major forces which acted upon the life and thought of Burroughs. It is a part of the indirect influence which came to him through many friendly contacts and an unusually wide range of reading. In Thoreau, he felt the same heroic quality with which he was impressed in Carlyle. Muir's friendship meant more to him than his writing. On Burroughs's first trip to California in 1909, John Muir met him in Arizona to guide him personally through the petrified forests and Grand Cañon. The "two Johnnies" - "John o' Mountains" and "John o' Birds" had rare hours together, both then and on occasional later

68. Life and Letters, V. I, p. 298.

69. Light of Day, p. 218.

meetings. Muir's books did not appeal so greatly to Burroughs as did his conversation, although the ⁷⁰"thoroughness and ... searching logic" of Muir's Sierra Studies pleased him greatly.

In Burroughs's early man-hood, while still struggling to "find himself," the works of Audubon supplemented the influence of Emerson in sending Burroughs to Nature, particularly in directing his attention anew to the birds he had always loved. While teaching school near West Point in the fall of 1863, Burroughs ran across some books of Audubon in the library of the Military Academy. ⁷¹"It was like bringing together fire and powder. I was ripe for the adventure; I had leisure; I was in a good bird country, and I had Audubon to stimulate me." The result of this reading and tramping was "The Return of the Birds," a leading article the Atlantic Magazine in the spring of 1865.

To attempt to name, let alone discuss, the many other authors and friends to whom Burroughs was "indebted for entertainment and knowledge" would be utterly impossible. As he testified, ⁷²"Their name is legion." This is quite obvious when we consider his long life (during which he was always reading), extending through those vital and formative periods in the growth and expansion of American literature,

70. Life and Letters, V. II, p. 134.

71. Our Friend John Burroughs, pp. 107-08.

72. This Study, p. 33.

as well as through the great age of invention, industrialism, and scientific discovery, both in this country and Europe. He read widely in philosophy, theology, science, and literature. In literature, he began with Johnson, Whipple, Higginson; at Cooperstown, he delved into Addison, Lamb, Pope, Thomson, Young, Saint Pierre's *Studies*, and parts of Shakspeare and Wordsworth before he happened upon Emerson in the library. From this time on, he might be said to have "taken all knowledge to be his province." In one place we find him preferring the novels of Hardy and Barrie to those of Dickens and Howells; in another, his particular "indoor companions" are ⁷³"Montaigne, Sainte-Beuve, Carlyle, Arnold, Wordsworth, Darwin, Huxley, Emerson, Bergson, and many others, ancient and modern." One of his friends writes: ⁷⁴"It was hard for me, long as I had known him, to realize the immense range of his reading and the ground he covered in his writing. It is only now, as I am re-reading his books in their proper order, that I begin to estimate in something like just degree, the depth and patience of his marvelous intellectual discipline."

To recount his many friends and the great men he knew or met is as impossible as to give the full extent and variety of Burroughs's reading. A ⁷⁵list, made for his son, of the "great men" whom he knew, is significant. In this list, he tells of meeting Emerson three times; he met Carlyle,

73. *Our Friend John Burroughs*, p. 187.

74. GARLAND, *HAMLIN*, *The Century*, Sept., 1921, p. 741.

75. *My Boyhood*, pp. 3-4, *passim*.

Moncure Conway, and the Rossettis in London; he knew Whitman intimately from 1863 to 1892; he met Lowell and Whittier, but not Longfellow and Bryant; he saw Lincoln, Grant, Farly, Sherman, Sumner, Garfield, Cleveland, and other notable men; he heard Tyndall deliver lectures on light in Washington; he met Matthew Arnold in New York and heard him lecture on Emerson. This list is, of course, incomplete. Under "other notable men," if space permitted, we might supply many names. Only a few can be mentioned. He met and corresponded with Edward Dowden of Dublin; he attended a breakfast in New York in honor of Edmund Gosse; he ⁷⁶camped and tramped "with Roosevelt; ⁷⁷visited and traveled with the Fords, Edisons, and Firestones. Of the men of letters in his own country, it is safe to assert that there were few, of any prominence, with whom he had not some contact, either personally or through their writings. Down through the years of his century run these experiences, from his first meeting with Emerson, "white-haired and nobly ageing," past most of the contemporaries of his own age, to his parting at the journey's end with such remaining friends as Sharp and Garland - Garland, also white-haired and nobly ageing. His was verily a notable life.

76. Appendix I, end of this chapter, p.

77. Ibid., p.

Characteristics of Burroughs

If these many friends influenced him, we may rest assured that the influence was reciprocal. What were the characteristics of Burroughs which attracted people to him, from all walks of life? In the first place, there was his friendliness. A man void of a friendly spirit is not blessed - or troubled - with friends. ⁷⁸"Few men," said another lover of Nature shortly after his death, "have had more friends than Burroughs. As I sat looking over the strange medley of them gathered at his funeral, I wondered at them and asked myself what it was in this simple, childlike man, lover of the bluebird, ... that drew great men and little children about him. He was elemental. He kept his soul ... and the virtue that went from him restored to them their souls." President Roosevelt, in dedicating one of his books to "Dear Oom John," wrote, "It is a good thing for our people that you have lived." Thomas A. Edison gave heartfelt tribute; "Burroughs is one of the highest types yet evolved in the advance of man to a higher stage." In an appreciation of Burroughs, commenting on these two expressions of regard, an editorial affirms that ⁷⁹"There is something distinctly memorable in the thought that a President of the United States and a great inventive genius should have felt that they honored themselves in honoring a naturalist. ... He did more than any other American, living or dead, to acquaint the

78. SHARP, *The Seer of Slabsides*, p. 9.

79. *Current Opinion*, "Evolution of Burroughs", V. 70, p. 644.

masses with nature." These are but a few of the many words of appreciation from friends "far and near."

His truth, sincerity, and honesty are dominant characteristics. He loved to know and to know why he knew.
80"How much more valuable to a man is an instinct for the truth than any special gift. ... If he craves the truth alone, he will not be disturbed if his theories and systems fall in ruins about his head. 'Then I must find a larger and deeper truth,' he says." Regarding his honesty, his son testifies: 81"Father was an absolutely honest man, honest not only in packing a crate of grapes, but honest as to his own weaknesses and shortcomings. ... He was always cautioning us about cutting grapes, to cut only such as we would be willing to eat ourselves; not to mislead or cheat the purchaser."

Sensitiveness, patience, accurate observation, keen discrimination, determination, and proper humility, constitute qualities typical of the rare naturalist that we find in Burroughs. His Journal portrays the 82acuteness of certain senses, - sight, sound, smell. He detects the slightest sounds in the woods and elsewhere, as well as odors; he perceives minute, motionless, objects at a distance or obscured by the grass or foliage near at hand. In everyday life, this sensitiveness is somewhat of a handicap, making harsh voices and mechanical sounds at times extremely painful. But his

80. Life and Letters, V. I, p. 366.

81. My Boyhood, p. 160.

82. Life and Letters, pp. 309-334, passim.

patience and humility would save the day. ⁸³"Father," his son wrote of him, "had the pride of humility: that is, he had the true spirit of the craftsman, pride in and for his work, and not pride of self. Nothing was too good for his art, nothing too poor for himself." Again, Julian tells us that his father ⁸⁴"had a streak of stubborn determination ... and a wonderful patience ... that did him much credit." These traits carried him through the discouragements of his early struggle for an education; they aided him in the satisfying of his eagerness for knowledge and his urge to self-expression.

Burroughs's love of simplicity has been demonstrated in the character of his homes and in his manner of living. He formally expresses it in one of his essays: ⁸⁵"I am bound to praise the simple life because I have lived it and found it good. When I depart from it, evil results follow. I love a small house, plain clothes, simple living." One need not read far in his writings to feel this simplicity, together with a tolerant sympathy and gentleness, which draw one to him.

A quiet humor, serene happiness, and optimism are other traits of which his friends and works give evidence. His outlook upon life was essentially optimistic. ⁸⁶"John Burroughs," writes a friend, "was an optimist. ... He planted and expected to gather - grapes from his grapevines, books

83. My Boyhood, p. 166.

84. Ibid., p. 159.

85. Leaf and Tendril, p. 260.

86. SHARP, The Seer of Slabsides, p. 25.

from his bookvines, years, satisfactions, sorrows, joys, all that was due him." 87"I have had a happy life and there is not much of it I would change if I could live it over again," Burroughs tells us in one of his best-known essays, "An Outlook Upon Life." His humor was kindly and spontaneous, springing from natural situations, and was not at the expense of anybody's comfort. In fact, he had no taste for coarse humor or practical jokes. 88"I can't bear to make anyone feel awkward or embarrassed," he once wrote a friend. It was his quick, witty turns of speech or quaint fancies that his friends found delightful. In testing a duck which he was cooking at Slabsides, he remarked that he just wanted to see "if the duck was relenting." Discovering the cause of his oil-stove's not burning to be a lack of fuel, he sheepishly suggested that 89"a stove that won't go once in awhile without oil is a contrary thing." Happy is his reference to the approach of the strawberry season: 90"The golden age draws sensibly near."

His love of nature needs no comment; love not only for the grand and sublime, but for the simple, common-place things of everyday life and field. He was ever conscious of the various manifestations of Nature regardless of what he was engaged in. 91"Telling of a fishing trip, he characteristically makes note of the day. 'It was a day of great

- 87. Leaf and Tendril, p. 241.
- 88. Life and Letters, V. II, p. 291.
- 89. Ibid., V. I, p. 368.
- 90. Locusts and Wild Honey, p. 57.
- 91. Life and Letters, V. I, p. 263.

beauty ... what a day! Still, restful, the very air luminous. ... All the maple trees in the valley burning."

His biographer admits that sometimes his usual patience and urbanity changed to impatience and passing curtness; that under stress and strain, as during the period of the World War, he shocked a few friends by swearing; that his loyalty to truth and friends sometimes led him into rash generalizations and partisanship, as in the case of his defense of Whitman. But these imperfections she regarded as not typical of the man and as due in his late years to illness and distress. In other words, she might have said, he was human. ⁹²"Revering Whitman as he did," she continued, "if a writer disparaged Whitman, Whitman's disciple found it difficult to find much in that writer's work." But this was simply his "limitation" and did not affect the general quality of his criticism; was not, in fact, representative of the "penetrating insight" that characterized most of his critical writing.

To those who do not demand an ideal temperament under all circumstances, these evidences of occasional human imperfections in Burroughs will not seem astounding or unforgivable. Indeed, they but draw us closer to him. We can well overlook his moments of weakness and partiality in contemplation of his more habitual attitude of kindly, gracious, though discerning friendliness and judgment.

92. Life and Letters, V. II, p. 344.

Burroughs's Attitude toward Public Affairs

As a lover of nature and the paths of peace, - a man who wants his days "linked each to each" by some "quiet, congenial occupation," Burroughs took no prominent or active part in public affairs. ⁹³"I have lived apart from the noise and strife of my times - political, commercial, sociological, scientific - a spectator rather than a participator." Nevertheless, Burroughs was not lacking in interest toward the problems of his times; but his influence was through his writings. In retrospect, he felt that it may have been selfish for him to pursue his peaceful life, "doing the thing I loved," while others toiled to bring relief to those burdened with "sin, perplexity, trouble." "But," he added, "I have been a good fisherman, and should have been a poor missionary, or reformer, or leader of any crusade against sin or crime. I am not a fighter, I dislike any sort of contest ... my strength is in my calm, my serenity, my sunshine."

His peace-loving inclinations, and, of more weight with him, the illness of his wife for several years, kept him from enlisting in the Civil War. Furthermore, he was influenced by the solicitations of many friends, who felt the development of his talent as a naturalist and writer to be a greater duty than to answer the call of war. ⁹⁴"Mere numbers," they told him, were much less than generalship in those critical first

93. My Boyhood, pp. 1-2.

94. Life and Letters, V. I, pp. C1-125.

years, and Burroughs was needed elsewhere. With what anxious interest he followed every movement, and how deep was his adoration of Lincoln, can only be appreciated by reading his ⁹⁵Journals and letters. During the Spanish-American war, the Japanese War, and the World War, his desire that right and truth should prevail, his distress at the sacrifice of life, were painfully evident. One of the intensest disappointments of his life was the failure of the United States to join the League of Nations. This, he believed at that time, would stop the ⁹⁶"settling of differences between nations by a barbarous trial of strength ... by the slaughtering of young men by the millions."

Despite his deeper interest in literature and nature, he found time to inform himself regarding important affairs of his government and country. Presidential elections were grave matters to him. Although a Republican in his early manhood, he later voted independently, Cleveland and Wilson receiving his vote. Principle rather than expediency determined his political reactions. He was early in favor of woman suffrage. ⁹⁷"American women need a wider field of interest," he told a woman's club in Massachusetts in 1892. "To hold her own with men; to be man's mate, a woman must have something like his interest in science, in politics, in economics."

95. Life and Letters, V. I, pp 61-125.

96. Johnson, John Burroughs Talks, pp. 340-346.

97. Life and Letters, V. I, p. 333.

Burroughs believed in as much education as one could obtain, and sent his own son to Harvard. A college education, he thought, brought its own reward and was a source of lifelong satisfaction whether it was utilized in an economic way or not. His contribution to education consisted in his nature books. ⁹⁸In 1887, Miss Mary E. Burt of the Chicago City Schools started a movement to interest children simultaneously in "Nature lore and good literature," through the use of certain of Burroughs's essays. The movement spread, Burroughs Societies were organized, and Burroughs was frequently called upon to be present at school exercises given in his honor. In connection with Nature study, the laboratory method was a source of great concern and irritation to Burroughs. Having loved and studied his birds and flowers in the fields and woods, he shuddered at the artificial nature study of the schools and failed to recognize its proper values. ⁹⁹"This classroom peeping and prying into the mechanism of life, dissecting, probing, tabulating, void of free observation, shut away from the open air, ... would turn my ornithology to ashes in my hands."

98. Life and Letters, V. I, p. 285.

99. Our Friend John Burroughs, p. 81.

The Writing of John Burroughs

Much might be written on the evolution in the style and thought of Burroughs from his first youthful efforts down to the work of the master craftsman. In this part of our study, we shall attempt but a brief glance at the classes of writing represented, the approximate times into which they fall, and the relative importance of these works from the point of view of other well-known men of letters. No sharp lines can be drawn. Always there is Nature in the writing of Burroughs. Increasingly after 1886, there were scientific, philosophical, and religious writings, as well as literary criticism. With the exception of one critical work, Notes on Walt Whitman as Poet and Person, published in 1867, his work prior to 1886 may be classified roughly as nature writing. The period between 1867 and 1899 is prevaillingly critical, there being two books of criticism and one of nature essays. His work of the new century opened with Light of Day, a discussion of religion from the point of view of the scientist. From this time on until the end of his life, he devoted continually more time to critical and philosophical works, with only occasional books on Nature. A complete list of the names of his books, arranged in chronological order, with the dates of publication, will be found in Appendix II at the close of this chapter.

High tribute has been paid the work of Burroughs in its various fields. He himself, looking backwards, said the process of his growth had been from the complex

to the simple and direct. ¹⁰⁰"The less the page seems written, ... the more natural and instinctive it is, other things being equal, the more it pleases me. I would have the author take no thought of the style, as such; yet if his sentences are clothed like the lilies of the field, so much the better. Unconscious beauty that flows inevitably and spontaneously out of the subject - how it takes us!" Yet Hamlin Garland writes: ¹⁰¹"To many Burroughs was a naturalist, a writer of birds. To me he was above all else an essayist, a stylist of singular clarity and precision and beauty."

Two directly opposite criticisms, taken together, constitute the highest praise. Mr. Fred Lewis Pattee believes Burroughs's "most distinctive work" to be in the field of literary criticism. ¹⁰²"The literary criticism of Burroughs ... may be classed with the sanest and most illuminating critical work in American literature." Dallas Lore Sharp thinks Burroughs's ¹⁰³"a rather remarkable lot of books ... for these books deal very largely with nature, and by themselves constitute the largest, most significant group of nature books that have come, perhaps, from any single pen. ... If he has done any desirable thing, made any real contribution to American literature, that will be found among these books." Again, ¹⁰⁴"the essay whose matter

100. Our Friend John Burroughs, p. 105.

101. Century, Sept. 12, 1921.

102. PATTEE, FRED LEWIS, American Literature Since 1870,
pp. 152-3.

103. SHARP, DALLAS LORE, The Seer of Slabsides, pp. 16-17.

104. Ibid., p. 33.

is nature, whose moral is human, whose manner is strictly literary, belongs to John Burroughs. His work is distinguished by this three-fold and even emphasis." That is, a critic of literature gives his highest commendation to the work of Burroughs which lies in his own field; a naturalist, not without renown, eulogizes the nature work of Burroughs. As was said before, the ensemble constitutes high praise.

12

The Influence of Burroughs's Travels

Burroughs, though a home lover, made trips from time to time, ¹⁰⁵east and west, north and south, throughout his own country. He visited Hawaii, Jamaica, and Cuba; he made two European trips. After each trip some fresh beauty was added to his pages. Miss Barrus thus phrases the reflection of his travels in his essays: He ¹⁰⁶"seems to have appropriated all outdoors for his stamping ground. He has given us in his limpid prose intimate glimpses of the hills and streams and pastoral farms of his native country; he has taken us down the Pepacton, the stream of his boyhood; we have traversed with him the 'Heart of the Southern Catskills' and the valleys of the Neversink and the Beaverkill; we have sat upon the banks of the Potomac and sailed down the Saquenay; we have had a glimpse of the Blue Grass region, and 'A Taste of Maine Birch'; we have walked with him the lanes of Mellow

105. Appendix I, This Study.

106. Our Friend John Burroughs, pp. 21-22.

England; journeyed 'In the Carlyle Country'; marvelled at the azure glaciers of Alaska; wandered in the perpetual summerland of Jamaica; camped with him and the Strenuous One in the Yellowstone; looked in awe and wonder at the 'Divine Abyss', the Grand Canyon of the Colorado; felt the 'Spell of the Yosemite', and idled with him under the sun-steeped skies of Hawaii and by her morning seas. ... not untraveled, yet he is no wanderer. No man ever had the home feeling stronger than he; none is more completely under the spell of a dear and familiar locality."

The more widely one reads Burroughs, the more he notices this enrichment which his travels lend to his thought, even while his heart finds its deepest joy in home scenes. During the last year of his life, in one of his ¹⁰⁷Day by Day papers, he sketched an experience illustrative of this idea. He described the refreshing beauty of the April landscape about Slabsides, reflecting that it was all due to the decay of the rocks, and that the chief agency was "the gentle rain of heaven"; that without the rain, he would have "looked upon only one wild welter of broken or crumpled rocky strata; not a green thing, not a living thing." Then, as if in proof of his supposition, before his mind's eye flashed a scene from the Hawaiian Islands. "On one end of the island of Mani, the rainfall is very great, and its deep valleys and high ridges are clothed with tropical verdure, while on the other

end, barely ten miles away, rain never falls, and the barren, rocky desolation which the scene presents I can never forget." This is but one of many happy and informal evidences of the effects of his travel upon his writing. His habit of investing his descriptions with some human touch is shown by a remark, while in England, when suddenly coming upon a red clover blossom by the way: ¹⁰⁸"The first red clover head just bloomed ... but like the people I meet, it has a ruddier cheek than those at home." He has written entire essays regarding his experiences in foreign lands - charming essays - and these stray references supplementing his thoughts of Nature, or often illustrating a point in his philosophy, but increase the beauty and effectiveness of his work.

13

Honors Received

If one had any doubt of the profound impression Burroughs made upon the thought of his times, he might find it dispelled by a consideration of the honors bestowed upon him during his lifetime. Statues have been dedicated to heroes and men of letters before. Burroughs had the distinction of being present at the unveiling of a statue in his own honor. This statue, called The Seer, was made by the gifted young Italian sculptor, Pietro, in 1915, and was presented to the city of Toledo, Ohio, by its purchaser, Mr. W. E. Bock. ¹⁰⁹"It is of heroic size; ... it has a symbolical signifi-

¹⁰⁸. Our Friend John Burroughs, p. 263.

¹⁰⁹. Life and Letters, V. II, p. 221.

cance, seeming to depict one whose vision includes the universe; who sees the wonders that have been, that now are, and that will be. It is the Seer." At the unveiling of this statue in 1918, twenty thousand school children, bringing flowers, passed in review before Burroughs.

From the point of view of a teacher of young people, a touchingly beautiful honor came to Burroughs through the auspices of the Superintendent of Schools in New York City. On his seventy-fourth birthday, April third, 1911, the following letter, written by Burroughs two weeks previously, was read in every school of the city, over six hundred thousand school children hearing it: ¹¹⁰"As the years pass, I think my interest in this huge globe upon which we live, and in the life which it holds, deepens. An active interest in life keeps the currents going and keeps them clear. Mountain streams are young streams; they sing and sparkle as they go, and our lives may be the same. With me, the secret of my youth in age is the simple life - simple food, sound sleep, the open air, daily work, kind thoughts, love of nature, and joy and contentment in the world in which I live. No excesses, no alcoholic drinks, no tobacco, no tea or coffee, no stimulants stronger than water and food.

"I have had a happy life. I have gathered my grapes with the bloom upon them. May you all do the same."

110. Life and Letters, V. II, p. 157.

The influence of a letter of this nature on the impressionable minds of children and adolescent youth is incalculable.

Burroughs received three honorary degrees. The first, Doctor of Letters, was conferred by Yale, June 23, 1910. The title of Doctor of Humane Letters was conferred on him by Colgate University in 1911, and that of Doctor of Letters by the University of Georgia in 1915. In 1916, the American Institute of Arts and Letters awarded him a gold medal for his work as an essayist and in belles-lettres.

14

His Death

A few more years of work and happiness followed the bestowing of these honors before John Burroughs left the earth, the sky, the flowers, the birds, the people he loved. In the fall of 1920, he went to California for his health. With the coming of spring in 1921, his heart yearned for his native hills. Accompanied by friends, though far from well, he started home. He lost the race by twelve hours, dying March twenty-ninth, on the train, speeding through Ohio. On April third, his eighty-fourth birthday, he was buried beside his Boyhood Rock on the old Homestead where he was born. A line from his best-loved poem, *Waiting*, is engraved on the tablet placed on the Boyhood Rock:

"I stand amid the eternal ways."

APPENDIX I

Chronology

For convenience in reference, the principal events in the life of John Burroughs, exclusive of his writings, are herein listed in chronological order. The source of this chronology is the Life and Letters of John Burroughs by Clara Barrus, his literary executrix. The titles of his books, with dates of publication, will be found in Appendix II.

- 1837 - April 3, born to Chauncey A. Burroughs and Amy Kelley Burroughs, their seventh child, a son, John Burroughs, at Roxbury, Delaware County, New York, high up in the Catskills on the Homestead farm.
- 1854 - End of his boyhood life, spent on the homestead.
- 1854 - Decade 1854-1864 covers Burroughs's teaching experiences in various rural district schools of New York, and one term of six months at Buffalo Grove, near Polo, Illinois, during the winter of 1856-57.
- 1854 - From October to May, inclusive, at Hedding Literary Institute, Ashland, New York.
- 1856 - From April to end of July, at Cooperstown Seminary, Cooperstown, New York.
- 1857 - September 12, John Burroughs married to Ursula North.
- 1863 Met Emerson at Westport; 1873, heard Emerson lecture at Baltimore and Washington; 1879, met Emerson in Boston at Holmes's breakfast.

- 1863 - Met Whitman first in the autumn of 1863 at Washington; knew him intimately from that time on until Whitman's death in 1892.
- 1864 - From 1864 to 1873, a government clerk in the Department of the Treasury, Washington, D. C.
- 1870 - Heard Tyndall lecture on light in Washington, D. C.
- 1871 - Was one of four men to carry \$50,000,000.00 in bonds, to be refunded, to London.
- 1871 - Met Carlyle in London in company with Moncure Conway.
- 1871 - Dined with the Rossettis in London.
- 1873 - From January, 1873, to 1885, acted as receiver of an insolvent bank and as special National Bank Examiner for districts along the Hudson, other sections of New York, and in certain sections of Virginia. This work consumed four or five months of each year, yielding him \$1400.00 to \$1500.00 a year.
- 1873 - Purchased fruit farm near West Port on the Hudson and built Riverby. This continued his home, where he "cultivated the land for marketable fruit and the fields and woods for nature literature", to the end of his life.
- 1878 - * April 15th, birth of his only child, a son, John Burroughs.

*On page 49 of his book The Real John Burroughs, Mr. William Sloane Kennedy alleges that Julian Burroughs was "a son of one of John Burroughs's brothers, probably Curtis", and that he was adopted in infancy. In refutation of this statement, I quote the following from the official Life and Letters, v. I, p. 200 and p. 201: "The year 1878 was comparatively uneventful, with a few outstanding features, of which the birth of a son in April was the chief." ... "Things crowded fast that eventful April ... his son was born on the fifteenth."

- 1882 - Took his family to Europe.
- 1883 - Met Matthew Arnold in New York and heard his lecture on Emerson.
- 1889 - Was a member of the Harriman expedition to Alaska and Siberia.
- 1902 - Trip to Jamaica with Julian and Mr. Charles D. Kellogg of Philadelphia.
- 1903 - Trip to the Grand Cañon and Yellowstone with Roosevelt.
- 1903 - "Defender of Nature" against nature fakers and romancers.
- 1905 - A trip with Mrs. Burroughs to Bermuda.
- 1909 - First trip to California and a trip to Hawaii.
- 1910 - Honorary degree of Doctor of Letters conferred on Burroughs by Yale University,
- 1911 - Degree of Doctor of Humane Letters conferred on Burroughs by Colgate University.
- 1911 - Trip to California with Mrs. Burroughs.
- 1913 - Motor trip through New England with the Fords and Bucks.
- 1914 - Wintered in Georgia and Florida, with Mrs. Burroughs.
- 1915 - Honorary degree of Doctor of Letters conferred by University of Georgia.
- 1916 - A gold Medal awarded to Burroughs for his work as an essayist and in belles-lettres by the American Institute of Arts and Letters.
- 1917 - Cruise in Southern Waters, taking in Cuba, with the

Fords.

- 1917 - March 6, death of his wife.
- 1918 - April 12, Statue of Burroughs, The Seer, unveiled in the city of Toledo, Ohio.
- 1918 - Auto-camping trip to the Great Smoky Mountains with Edison, Ford, and Firestone.
- 1920 - Trip to southern California with side trips to Mexico.
- 1920 - November, a second trip in this year to southern California, for his health.
- 1921 - March 29, death of Burroughs.
- 1921 - April 3, buried by his Boyhood Rock on the old Homestead at Roxbury.

APPENDIX II

List of Books by John Burroughs

This list of books is taken from The Life and Letters of John Burroughs, by Clara Barrus, volume II, page 426, with the addition of the two following: Songs of Nature, an anthology of nature poems edited by Burroughs; and My Boyhood, by John Burroughs, with a conclusion by his son, Julian Burroughs.

- 1867, *Notes on Walt Whitman as Poet and Person.
- 1871, Wake-Robin.
- 1875, Winter Sunshine.
- 1877, Birds and Poets.
- 1879, Locusts and Wild Honey.
- 1881, Pepacton.

*In the American Mercury for April, 1924, one Frederick P. Hier, Jr., has alleged, under title, "The End of a Literary Mystery", that Whitman wrote half of Burroughs's book, Notes on Walt Whitman as Poet and Person. Burroughs's literary executrix, having complete access to the early Note Books and Journals of Burroughs, as well as to much of his correspondence with friends relative to the growth and publication of this book, has shown (in my opinion, conclusively) in the Life and Letters of John Burroughs, v. I, pp. 108 to 129, that this statement of Mr. Hier is a gross misrepresentation of facts. Dr. Barrus furthermore shows that Mr. Hier secured from Burroughs the letters, on which he bases his misleading statements, under the alias of Egmont H. Arens; and that he printed these letters without the consent of the literary executrix of John Burroughs. After disregarding the natural prejudice which Mr. Hier's duplicity excites, after judging, as well as I can, his article on its merits alone, and after carefully evaluating the full and detailed refutation of Dr. Barrus, I am convinced that her conclusion is justified.

- 1884, Fresh Fields.
- 1886, Signs and Seasons.
- 1889, Indoor Studies.
- 1894, Riverby.
- 1896, Whitman, A Study.
- 1900, The Light of Day.
- 1901, Songs of Nature. (Anthology).
- 1902, Literary Values.
- 1902, The Life of Audubon.
- 1904, Far and Near.
- 1905, Ways of Nature.
- 1906, Bird and Bough (poems).
- 1907, Camping and Tramping with Roosevelt.
- 1908, Leaf and Tendril.
- 1912, Time and Change.
- 1913, The Summit of the Years.
- 1915, The Breath of Life.
- 1916, Under the Apple Trees.
- 1919, Field and Study.
- 1920, Accepting the Universe.
- 1921, Under the Maples.
- 1922, The Last Harvest.
- 1922, My Boyhood (Autobiographical).

CHAPTER II

The Thought of Burroughs
upon
Nature and Science

The Thought of Burroughs upon Nature and Science

1

Nature as the Embodiment of Law

In the preceding chapter, an attempt has been made to show how Burroughs, consciously and unconsciously, was being prepared for authorship in the field of nature and philosophic thought. The influence of his ancestry was shown to be more or less problematical, and we resorted to the theory of variation from type to account for at least a portion of his genius. We found his youthful environment had a lifelong influence upon his character and thought; very early, he felt the beauty of nature's various forms, and almost as early, was conscious of the spiritual power behind these visible aspects of nature. His aesthetic sensibilities awakened, and he experienced strange moods of exaltation and joy, occasioned equally by the intangible and but dimly-understood appeal of nature and by the effect of a passage in literature. His mind, athirst for knowledge, by happy chance, came in contact with the best in literature. While his academic life was limited, it was of sufficient length to give valuable reading habits and to introduce him to a new field of literature. In the library he found Emerson, and the floodgates of his soul were opened. Emerson helped him to a better literary expression, made him aware of a unity throughout Nature, and quickened his sense of the beautiful. In Whitman, he found a rare companion and friend, who enriched his emotional nature, quickened his sympathies, and gave him a broader conception of life. Whitman "brooded

him", personally helping, stimulating, and encouraging him in the art of self-expression. Whitman gave him a new consciousness of the magnitude of the cosmos and intensified his developing sense of the unity of nature. Wordsworth, if possible, deepened this sense of the integrality of nature and of the spiritual behind the visible. Carlyle aroused his admiration for the heroic and for fearless moral courage. The science of Tyndall, Darwin, and Huxley made him more fully conscious of natural laws and their workings in man's life. Darwin's desire for truth, regardless of where truth led, made a profound impression upon Burroughs's thought. Arnold's clarity of thinking and his keen discernment appeared to Burroughs as indispensable qualities of a critic and thinker. In the sum total of these influences upon the mind of Burroughs, exists the source of his attitude toward nature, science, philosophy, and religion. Outstanding characteristics of his thought are love of nature and humanity, quick response to the spiritual, the aesthetic, the beautiful; perception of the unity of nature; recognition of the laws of the universe, as revealed by the researches of science; keen discernment and clarity of thinking; high spirituality; and an insistence upon the truth in all things.

Despite Burroughs's debt to Emerson and Whitman, despite his deep admiration for the former and his love for the latter, we found even in his young manhood a certain independence of mind which foreshadowed the future thought of the naturalist. He resisted the intuitive perception of Emerson

and could not share in Whitman's belief in personal immortality. His naturally questioning mind, both in his youth and throughout life, demanded objective proof, bidding him beware of purely subjective deductions and reactions; his developing scientific curiosity early led him to further investigation before accepting principles out of harmony with nature. Nevertheless, he was at no time lacking in a devout, religious spirit, but all powers of the mind, he insisted, must be used in the evaluating of problems. ¹"Theological grounds", he wrote, "do not count with me. I want nothing less than a faith founded upon a rock, faith in the constitution of things. The various man-made creeds are fictitious like the constellations -- Orion, Cassiopeia's Chair, the Big Dipper; the only thing real in them is the stars, and the only thing real in the creeds is the soul's aspiration toward the Infinite. This abides, though creeds and dogmas change or vanish." That is, Nature led him to science; and out of his love of Nature and his interpretation of the laws governing the natural world, as revealed by science, grew his religious philosophy.

We need not be surprised therefore to find the three fields overlapping in his writings. Just as Nature was ever in his thought, so also was the consciousness of a power, or force -- "creative energy", he sometimes calls it; oftener, simply, Nature -- which he, like Wordsworth, felt to be immanent in all things. In this study, we shall attempt to present first the main tenets of Burroughs's nature and scientific thought, and then to discuss his religious philosophy. If there is some overlapping, it is incident to the close relationship.

1. Accepting the Universe, p. viii.

tion of the three phases of thought in the author's mind. Frequently, what might illustrate a point in science, is equally applicable to some analogous view upon religion.

Science, in the broadest sense, Burroughs says, is simply that which may be verified. ²"It is the scientific spirit that demands complete verification, that applies past experience to new problems, that sees that immutable laws lie at bottom of all phenomena, and that is skeptical of all exceptions to the logical course of events until they are irrefragably proved. ... After it (science) has done its best, the mystery of creation is as deep as before. But what it has taught the race, and what the race can never unlearn, is that the sequence of cause and effect is inviolable, that the order of the physical universe is rational, that creation is not an historical event but a perpetual process, that there is no failure and no disorder in nature, and that to approximate to anything like a right understanding of things, the personal, or the anthropocentric, point of view must be abandoned."

A believer in truth, such as Burroughs was, does not let the so-called inconsistencies in scientific principles, from time to time, disturb his conviction that ultimately all that we know of our universe comes through scientific discovery, rather than subjective revelation. Science, he contends, is progressive; and if it makes mistakes today, it will correct them in the light of a new day. ³" To have a mind eager to know the great truths and broad enough to take them in and not get lost in the maze of apparent contradictions is undoubtedly the highest good. ... To love the truth and possess it forever, is

2. Light of Day, p.45 and 46

3. Leaf and Tendril, p. 250

the supreme good." Again, he reiterates: ⁴"Science makes no claim to infallibility.... The 'shifting of positions and changing of results' but marks its growth, its development; and it is precisely this active and inquiring spirit, this readiness to correct its errors, and this eagerness to reach a larger generalization, that makes it the enemy of the traditional theology. It abandoned the Ptolemaic system of astronomy for the Copernican, because the latter was found to be the most complete generalization. ... The main outlines of the physical universe science has undoubtedly finally settled; the great facts of astronomy and geology are not to be reversed or set aside. It is in the details, the filling in of the picture, that errors are still likely to occur."

Burroughs was very early, in his contacts with nature and with scientific writings concerning her laws, impressed with the fact that underlying all of her manifestations, was an absolute unity of law. This unity, or integrality, refuted or superseded for him two commonly-accepted ideas: first, the supposition of two conflicting powers in the universe, one working for the good of humanity, and the other for its downfall; second, the belief that man's advent into this world was unique and separate, or independent, from that of all other forms of life. ⁵"In all the vast stretch of geologic and biologic time", he asks, "do we see any evidence of the active existence of the God and the Devil of our fathers? Not unless we identify them with the material forces that then ruled and

4. Light of Day, pp. 44 -- 45

5. Accepting the Universe, p. 43

shaped the world; and these forces, by any other name, are of the same impersonal, impartial, unforgiving character as is disclosed in our dealings with them to-day." Burroughs saw these forces of prehistoric ages still contending in the world. Thus did he account for the atrocities of the World War and the anomaly of all the warring nations praying to the same God for victory. ⁶"Nature", he added, "is both God and Devil, and natural law is supreme in the world. The moral consciousness of man -- all our dreams of perfection, of immortality, of the good, the beautiful, the true, all our veneration and our religious aspirations, -- this is Nature too".

In an essay on the beneficence of nature, Burroughs further develops this principle of unity, showing that the apparently conflicting forces in Nature, one constructive and one destructive, were the basis of the dualism in the religions of the past. ⁷"The beneficent force", he tells us, "or providence that brought us here, has had to struggle with the non-beneficent in inert matter, and, at times, with what looks like the deliberately malignant in living matter; micro-organisms everywhere lying in wait for tangible bodies and reducing them back to the original dust out of which they came -- the work of one god being held up or wrecked by another god. In the vegetable kingdom are blights and scabs and many forms of fungus diseases; in the animal world are hostile bacteria and parasites working without and within. Little wonder our fathers had to invent a Devil, or a hierarchy of good and evil spirits con-

6. Ibid., p. 45

7. Is Nature Beneficent?, Yale Review, Jan., 1920

tending with one another, to explain the enigmas of life. But that the good spirits have prevailed over their enemies, that the natural providence has been on our side is proved by the fact that we are actually here and life is good to us." We should not deduce from this more than is intended. The beneficence of Nature, Burroughs believed, was all-embracing. Although opposing forces were continually at work, in the course of ages, the final results are good. ⁸"Science has showed man that he is not an alien in the universe, that he is not an exile from another sphere, or arbitrarily put here, but that he is the product of the forces that surround him. Science has banished the arbitrary, the miraculous, the exceptional from nature; and instead of these things, has revealed order, system, and the irrefragable logic of cause and effect. Instead of good and bad spirits contending with one another, it reveals an inevitable beneficence and a steady upward progress. It shows that the universe is made of one stuff, and that no atom can go amiss or lose its way."

This last thought, "the universe is made of one stuff", is one of the things we may take literally. Organic and inorganic matter, he states, resolved into their primal elements, are "one stuff". All living things are natural phenomena and must in some way be an outcome of natural order. The universe is "a oneness", and its laws are continuous. ⁹"We follow the chemistry of it to the farthest stars, and there is no ser-

8. Leaf and Tendril, p. 280

9. The Breath of Life, pp. 267 --8

ious break or exception; it is the same stuff. We follow the mechanics of it into the same abysmal depths, and there are no breaks or exceptions. The biology of it we cannot follow beyond our little corner of the universe; indeed, we have no proof that there is any biology anywhere else. But if there is, it must be similar to our own. There is only one kind of electricity (though two phases of it), only one kind of light and heat, one kind of chemical affinity, in the universe; and hence only one kind of laws."

These laws, or so-called laws, of which we speak, Burroughs makes clear, are not decreed by any power as our human laws are. There is no lawgiver. Nature's laws ¹⁰"are a sequence of events and activities; this sequence has worked itself out through countless ages. Nothing in the Universe was designed in our sense; it was not first a thought in some one's mind, then to become an act or a contrivance." But one thing, he tells us over and over, ¹¹"the universe is logical; the conclusion always follows the premises."

Throughout his mature life, Burroughs was a firm believer in evolution. ¹²"The astronomic view of our world", he asserts, "and the Darwinian view of our lives must go together. As one came out of the whirling, fiery nebulae, so the other came out of the struggling, slowly evolving, biological world of unicellular life of the old seas. Biologic time sets its seal upon one, and cosmic upon the other". He realizes the

10. Accepting the Universe, p. 79

11. Leaf and Tendril, p. 224

12. Accepting the Universe, p. 53

difficulties of the lay mind in accepting the full import of evolution. In the first place, there are our traditional religious inheritances, predisposing us to combat the idea of being literally evolved from the dust of the earth. The poetic conception of Genesis, in which God makes us out of the dust, is not so hurtful to our vanity, Burroughs says, as to be made by evolution, in common with all other forms of life. Furthermore, we miss the personality that we habitually imagine back of nature. ¹³"An impersonal law or process we cannot revere or fear or worship or exalt; we can only study it and put it to the test". Another difficulty is our inability to grasp the enormous stretches of time involved. ¹⁴"Geology", he tells us, "first gives us an adequate conception of time. The limitations which shut our fathers into the narrow close of six thousand years are taken down by this great science, and we are turned out into the open of unnumbered millions of years. Upon the background of geologic time our chronological time shows no more than a speck upon the sky. The whole of human history is but a mere fraction of a degree of this mighty arc. The Christian era would make but a few seconds of the vast cycle of the earth's history". Out of this "dark abyss of geologic time", came all of the life of our earth. ¹⁵"A great procession", Burroughs imagines it, "of ... strange and monstrous beasts, many of them colossal in size and fearful in form; and among the minor forms of this fearful troop ... we see the ones that

¹³. Time and Change, p. 179

¹⁴. Ibid., p. 90

¹⁵. Ibid., p. 91

carried safely forward, through the vicissitudes of those ages, the precious impulse that was to eventuate in the human race."¹⁶ "The creative energy", he writes at another time, "seems ever to have been pushing out and on, and yet ever leaving a residue of forms behind. The reptiles did not all become birds, nor the invertebrates all become vertebrates, nor the apes all become men, nor the men all become Europeans".

Time and time again, Burroughs asserts that the law of unity operates in the appearance of man on earth. In Nature, there is no first and no last. ¹⁷"There is an endless beginning and an endless ending. There was no first woman, no first bird, or fish, or reptile. Back of each one stretches an endless chain of approximating men and birds and reptiles". And during this vast reach of time, ¹⁸"Every creature", he says, "was exposed to the hazards of its kind; but within its reach are always the benefits and advantages of its kind, and these latter have kept steadily in the lead. The evolutionary impulse towards the horse, towards the dog, towards the bird, has apparently been as jealously guarded and promoted as the impulse towards man".

Despite Burroughs's innate predilection for the conclusions of science and his firm belief in evolution and the unity of nature, he could find no solution as to the beginning of vitality which completely satisfied his mind. He was not alone in this; his researches into science and philosophy revealed that to the minds of many eminent men, the origin of the first form of life was an inexplicable problem. In his

¹⁶ Leaf and Tendril, p. 223

¹⁷. Time and Change, p. 12

¹⁸. Is Nature Beneficent? Yale Review, Jan., 1921, p. 371

references to writings, early and late, there are many what he sometimes called. following Tyndall, "the mystery and the miracle of vitality". He considered the mechanico-chemical theory, the principle of the inherent creative power of matter, and spontaneous variation; but, as one might suspect, the origin of life remained to him a mystery; ¹⁹"If", he wrote, "life can finally be explained in terms of physics and chemistry, that is, if the beginning of life upon the globe was no new thing, the introduction of no new principle, but only the result of a vastly more complex and intimate play and interaction of the old physico-chemical forces of the inorganic world, then the gulf that is supposed to separate the two worlds of living and non-living matter, virtually disappears; the two worlds meet and fuse. We shall probably in time have to accept this view -- the view of the mechanico-chemical theory of life. It is in line with the whole revelation of science, so far -- the getting rid of the miraculous, the unknowable, the transcendental, and the enhancing of the potency and the mystery of things near at hand that we have always known in other forms".

Another characteristic of life with which Burroughs was impressed, was its apparently transient quality, compared to the universe as a whole, as well as the fundamental part which temperature plays in its appearance and continuance on a planet. To him, it was ²⁰"inseparably bound up with the cosmic processes, but ... fugitive, superficial, circumscribed",

¹⁹. Leaf and Tendril, p. 232

²⁰. The Breath of Life, p. 267

coming and going, penetrating the earth's crust but a little way, and confined to a certain range of temperature. ²¹"Beyond a certain degree of cold, on the one hand, it does not appear; and beyond a certain degree of heat, on the other, it is cut off. Without water or moisture, it ceases; and without air, it is not. It has evidently disappeared from the moon, and probably from the inferior planets, and it is doubtful if it has yet appeared on any of the superior planets, save Mars."

He thought much of the inability of the scientists to develop life in laboratories -- living from non-living matter. In The Long Road, he notes that a recent biologist believes this is because we cannot take time enough. ²²"Even if we could bring about the conditions of the early geologic ages in which life had its dawn, which of course we cannot, we could not produce life, because we have not geologic time at our disposal."

Never, in the many years of his thought upon the subject of the origin of vitality, could he accept the theological hypothesis of special creation. But realizing the great difference between the inorganic and the organic, as well as the vast superiority of the mind and consciousness of man over the mind of animals, he tried for several years, toward the close of life, to find some theory which would unravel the mystery. He conceived back of all matter, a ²³force, creative in

21. Ibid., pp. 267 -- 8

22. Time and Change, p. 11

23. The Breath of Life, pp. 21 -- 22

its nature, without beginning or end, ever undiminished, and of "two distinct manifestations, the organic and the inorganic, or the vital and the physical, -- the latter divisible into the chemical and the mechanical, the former made up of these two working in infinite complexity, because drawn into new relations and lifted to higher ends by this something we call life." Yet in his conclusions, he does not overlook the fact that the man of science accounts for ²⁴"all the phenomena of life in terms of the natural order. To the scientist, the universe is complete in itself", without "break or discontinuity anywhere. Threads of relation, visible and invisible, chemical, mechanical, electric, magnetic, solar, lunar, stellar, geologic, biologic, -- forming an intricate web of subtle forces and influences -- bind all things, living and dead, into a cosmic unity." As was said before, the origin of life remained a mystery to him as to many others. His final view was that of the scientist, colored by his own belief in an impersonal, spiritual force immanent in all nature.

The question of the origin of vitality was closely correlated in Burroughs's mind with another problem which engrossed his thought much of his life, that of design in nature. From his love of Nature and his observation of numerous analogies in the life about him; from his reflection upon the obvious superiority of man's mind over that of the highest animals -- man's reasoning powers, his ideals, his spir-

itual aspirations, his accomplishments, his control of the very forces of the material universe -- his mind was challenged as to whether, after all, there was not some design back of it. How could man have been the result of fortuitous variation? As early as 1860 (a month before his first essay in the Atlantic) he wrote in his diary: ²⁵"Is there no design of analogy in this Universe? Are these striking resemblances that wed remote parts, these family traits that break out all through nature and that show the unity of the creating mind, the work of chance?" In Time and Change, 1912, as well as Accepting the Universe, the last book published during his life, he shows that he is still thinking on this subject. ²⁶From the more human point of view, he tells us, to introduce chance into the world is to introduce chaos. But later, he writes: ²⁷"When we say of a thing or an event that it was a chance happening, we do not mean that it was not determined by the laws of matter and force; but we mean it was not the result of the human will or of anything like it; it was not planned or designed by conscious intelligence. Chance, in this sense, plays a very large part in Nature and life." This seemed to be his final conclusion. There was no designer and no design. What we call design was the unconscious application of our own anthropomorphic tendencies. In one of his writings, falling in time between the two just quoted, is a significant page, showing the steady development of his thought. ²⁸"It is hard to believe", he writes, "that the course of organic evolution

25. Sharpe, Seer of Slabsides, p. 13

26. Time and Change, p. 38

27. Accepting the Universe, p. 94

28. The Breath of Life, pp. 246 -- 7

would have eventuated in man and the other higher forms of life without some guiding principle; yet it is equally difficult to believe that the course of any guiding intelligence down the ages would have been strewn with so many failures and monstrosities, so much waste and suffering and delay. Man has not been specially favored by one force or element in Nature. Behold the enemies that beset him without and within, and that are armed for his destruction! The intelligence that appears to pervade the organic world, and that reaches its conscious expression in the brain of man, is just as manifest in all the forms of animals and plants that are inimical to him, in all his natural enemies. ... In fact, she (Nature) has endowed many of the lower creatures with powers that she has denied him. Evidently, man is only one of the cards in her pack; doubtless the highest one, but the game is not played for him alone."

In deciding upon Burroughs's final position, that there is no designer and no design in Nature, in our human sense, I have tried to consider the sum total of his thought; not a single passage, but the conclusions reached over and over, and ever the same, in his various writings. He adhered to his belief that the ways of the Infinite are past finite interpretation; that back of all phenomena, there was a force, a creative energy, working surely and invariably under the laws of cause and effect; but, as stated before, there was no special plan or design, as we understand the terms, looking

toward any particular plant, animal, person, or thing. ²⁹"An ever active, vital force pervades the universe," he writes, and is seen and felt in all things, from atomic attraction and repulsion up to wheeling suns and systems. The very processes of thought seem to require such premises to go upon." As if in supplement to this, though written several years later, we find the following: ³⁰"What unthinking people call design in Nature, is simply the reflection of our inevitable anthropomorphism. Whatever they can use they think was designed for that purpose, -- the air to breathe, the water to drink, the soil to plant. It is as if they thought the notch in the mountains was made for the road to pass over" but "it is the inevitable benefaction of the general providence of nature." What man wants from the general storehouse of nature, he must "distil out" for himself.

This general Providence, or force -- Nature -- is, in the long course of years, beneficent, Burroughs declares not once but many times. There is struggle, there is the arrival of the fit, and the survival of the fit, there is from time to time extinction of species; but out of all these conflicting forces, Nature moves on her way, bringing construction out of destruction, good out of evil. Man and animal and plant, he believes, are but the stronger for the conflicts they endure and the battles they win. The laws of integrality and the balance of nature hold. Nature may play one hand against the

29. Leaf and Tendril, p. 230.

30. Accepting the Universe, pp. 90-91.

other, but always maintains a perfect balance. What one form loses, another gains. Nature wins, Burroughs tells us ³²"by always trying to defeat herself." If cosmic forces did not go their own way without mercy or exception, if in them there were variableness and turning, ³¹"the vast inevitable beneficence of Nature would vanish, and the caprice and uncertainty of man take its place. ... What I am trying to get rid of is the pitying and meddling Providence which our feeble faith and half-knowledge have enthroned above us." In another place, ³³"The All," he writes, "brings mercy out of cruelty, love out of hatred, life out of death; but man's orbit is so small that he cannot harmonize these contradictions. The curve of the universal laws does not bring him round till generations have passed."

Nature, Burroughs believes, has no need of economy, as have we. She need observe no economy of effort, of material, of time, not running the universe on our "modern, business-efficiency principles." Time, profit, loss, solvency, or insolvency concern her not. In the long run, there is always a balance. ³⁴"In our astronomic age, there are probably vastly more dead suns and planets strewing the depths of sider-eal space than there are living suns and planets. But in some earlier period in the cycle of time the reverse may have been true, or it may be true in some future period." Nature has no

31. Accepting the Universe, p. 35.

32. Ibid., p. 18

33. Ibid., p. 85.

34. Breath of Life, p. 247.

need of our specialized vision; the wind needs no eyes to locate fertile spots upon which to plant Nature's "winged seeds." ³⁵"It drops them upon all spots, and each kind in due time finds its proper habitat." The methods of the natural providence, he reiterates, time and again, are too vast and complex for our ideas of prudence and economy. We deal with but parts, where she deals with wholes. With her, there is no ³⁶"well-defined cleavage between the good and the evil." This indifference on the part of Nature to human misery, and waste in life, -- from cyclones, earthquakes, wars, famine, pestilence -- Burroughs admits, is a matter of great concern from the human point of view. But from the point of view of the natural providence, it does not matter -- the result is sure.

Burroughs was deeply interested in the earth as a planet, as well as in the life upon it. ³⁷"The world was not made," he declared; "it is only a link in a chain of cosmic events, and it is not for man any more than it is for any other creature." In another place he observes that if he could be persuaded, as his fathers were, that the world was made by the fiat of a supernatural power, he would soon lose interest in it; for such an account took it out of the realm of natural causation, and placed it in the realm of the arbitrary and unnatural. ³⁸"But to know," he continues, "that it was not made

35. Under the Maples, p. 214.

36. Is Nature Beneficent? Yale Review, Jan., 1920.

37. Accepting the Universe, p. 48.

38. Time and Change, pp. 86-87,

at all, in the mechanical sense, but that it grew -- that it is an evolution as much as the life upon the surface, that it has an almost infinite past, that it has been developing and ripening for millions of years, veritable apple upon the great sidereal tree, ... such a revelation adds immensely to our interest in it."

The fact that the earth was a star -- one of untold numbers -- was to Burroughs of inestimable significance, changing completely not only our astronomical system but our theological system. ³⁹"Do you," he asked, "reason and speculated the same under Kepler's laws as under Ptolemy's spheres?" ⁴⁰"One of the hardest lessons we have to learn," he wrote at another time, "is to see the divine, the celestial, the pure, in the common, the near at hand, -- to see that heaven lies about us here in this world. ... We have invented the whole machinery of the supernatural, with its unseen spirits and powers, good and bad, to account for things because we found the universal, everyday nature too cheap, too common."

Throughout his writings, we come on passages showing Burroughs's love for the earth and his joy in it as one of the stars of heaven. In the last year of his life, he set down one of his most poetical descriptions of it as a ⁴¹"celestial body, floating in the luminiferous ether as in a sea, held in leash by the sun and as sensitive to its changes as

39. Light of Day, p. 221.

40. Leaf and Tendril, p. 217

41. Accepting the Universe, p. 52.

the poplar leaf to the wind, vast beyond our power to visualize, yet only a grain of sand on the shores of the Infinite; an evening and a morning star to the beings of other planets, if there are such; mottled with shining seas or green and white continents, canopied with many-lined cloud draperies, and existing in closest intimacies with the wonders and potencies of the sidereal heavens." This was the earth to Burroughs.

2

Nature and Man

It has been impossible to discuss Burroughs's belief in the laws of Nature, as revealed by science and particularly the evolution of life, without, at the same time, showing his conception of the origin of man. For man, in his view, is no special creation appearing long after the advent of other life on earth. Neither is he to be singled out as the sole end of all creation, the center of the universe, for whose happiness all things else were designed.⁴² "If love is creation's final law," he tells us, "it is not the love we as humans have for one another. God is love because he brooded man into being and all the other forms of life that support man. He made the heavens and the earth for man's good, by making man a part of them and able to avail himself of their bounty. But when we look into the universe and expect to find something like human care and affection in the operation of the great elemental laws and forces, something like fatherhood and motherhood

42. Is Nature Beneficent? Yale Review, Jan., 1920.

and brotherhood of man -- we are bound to be shocked. It is not there, and it is well for us that it is not there. A universe run on the principles of human economy and charity, and partiality would be a failure. It is our human weakness that yearns for this."

To Burroughs, man's common origin with other life was not a matter of grief. He felt that it added greatly to the wonder of life to be taken out of ⁴³"the realm of the arbitrary, the exceptional," and linked to "the sequence of natural causation." It is much less an occasion for wonder to bring man into the world by fiat than to conceive of his working his way up from the lower, non-human forms.⁴⁴ "That the manward impulse should never have been lost in the appalling vicissitudes of geologic time, that it should have been pushed steadily on, through mollusk and fish and amphibian and reptile, through swimming and creeping and climbing things, and that the forms that conveyed it should have escaped the devouring monsters of the earth, sea, and air till it came to its full estate in a human being is the wonder of wonders." In another place, he asserts that the laws of science have elevated the position of man in the universe; that evolution does not ⁴⁵"cheapen or degrade the spiritual; it elevates the carnal, the material." He believed that science has "enlarged and ennobled" our conception of the universe and has cleaned out the superstition and evil that so long have terrified

43. Time and Change, p. 3.

44. Ibid., p. 3.

45. Leaf and Tendril, p. 221.

mankind. With ⁴⁶" its indestructibility of matter, its conservation of energy, its inviolability of cause and effect, its unity of force and elements throughout sidereal space, it has prepared the way for a conception of man, his origin, his development, and in a measure his destiny, that at last makes him at home in the universe."

To many people, one of the most bitter aspects of the theory of evolution, as related to man, is what they conceive of as an attempt on the part of science to foist existing species of anthropoid apes into the direct ancestry of man. While to Burroughs there was nothing common or unclean in Nature, yet, as a mere matter of accuracy, he expressed his disbelief of this conception. ⁴⁷"The anthropoid apes," he wrote, "seem indeed like preliminary studies of man, or rejected models of the great inventor who was blindly groping his way to the higher form. The ape is probably our ancestor in no other sense than this. Nature seems to have had man in mind, but evidently she lost interest in him, humanly speaking, and tried some other combination. The ape must always remain the ape. Some collateral branch doubtless gave birth to a higher form, and this to a still higher, till we reach our preglacial forbears. Then some one branch or branches distanced all others, leaving rude tribes by the way in whom development seemed arrested, till we reach the dawn of history."

46. Leaf and Tendril, p. 221

47. Ibid., p. 222.

That is, he continued, we may think of the ⁴⁸"creative energy as working along many lines, only one of which eventuated in man; all the others fell short, or terminated in lower forms." The following "great lines" of Whitman's, he said he loved to make his own:

49"My embryo has never been torpid -- nothing could overlay it.
For it the nebula cohered to an orb,
The long, slow strata piled to rest in it,
Vast vegetables gave it sustenance,
Monstrous sauroids transported it in their mouths
and deposited it with care."

Just as in the evolution of life -- any life, plant or animal -- time is of its very essence, so likewise is it in the development of man. Burroughs realized how much simpler and more appealing to the average mind was the short-cut of theology in creating man by special act of a supernatural Being, than the long, devious, hazardous route of evolution, from the lowest primordial forms of life up to the mind of man. But science took upon itself this burden, and geology demonstrated that it need not be stinted for time.⁵⁰"Do you want a million or two years to account for this, or that? You shall have it for the asking. ... In human history a thousand years is a long time. Ten thousand more, and we are probably among the rude cave-men or river-drift men. One hundred thousand, and we are--where? Probably among the Simian ancestors of man. A million years, and we are probably in Eocene or Miocene times, among the huge and often grotesque mammals, and our ancestor,

48. Leaf and Tendril, p. 222.

49. Ibid., p. 220.

50. Time and Change, p. 97.

a little creature, probably of the marsupial kind, is skulking about and hiding from the great carnivorous beasts that would devour him." Not a pretty picture to some. ⁵¹"Carlyle," Burroughs tells us, "would have none of it! The Garden of Eden story had more beauty and dignity." "This backward glance," he continued, "repels because we regard it from a fairer and higher estate. ... It makes a vast difference whether we see the past as poetry or ... as science. In the Bible and in Whitman, we see it as poetry; in Darwin, we see it as science." But if we can learn to look upon Nature as the supreme reality, learn to consider ourselves not apart from the nature which surrounds us, but an expression of the total cosmic energy, as are all things else, then, Burroughs assures us, we shall ⁵²"have gained an astronomic point of view; we shall see things in orbic completeness." At another time, he writes: ⁵³"Our wills, our activities, go but a little way in separating us from the totality of things. Outside of the very limited sphere of what we call our spontaneous activities, we too are things and are shaped and ruled by forces that we know not of."

Although Burroughs, from early manhood to the end of his life, accepted the evolutionary hypothesis of the origin of man, rather than the theological one, there were times when this problem, like that of the origin of vitality, brought home to him the truth that the mystery of life and the universe

51. Summit of the Years, p. 57.

52. Accepting the Universe, p. 233.

53. Under the Maples, p. 184.

was beyond human comprehension. ⁵⁴"I suppose," he said, "that my logical faculties are convinced; but what is that in me, that is baffled, and that hesitates, and demurs?" Then he explains that his difficulty is due to the gulf that separates man from the orders below him. It is so impossible, man's ⁵⁵"intelligence is so radically different from theirs, and his progress is so enormous, while they have stood still, that believing it is like believing a miracle." And miracles, as we shall see later, he could not believe in, since they violated all known laws of nature. But however great was his perplexity, however he may have expressed himself regarding "the mystery" at different times throughout his life, we find his mind ever returning to what he conceived rational and logical. On the last page of his posthumous volume of essays, he gives us this final word on the subject. ⁵⁶"Nature," he tells us, "does not baby us nor withhold from us the bitter cup. We take our chances with all other forms of life. Our special good fortune is that we are capable of a higher development, capable of profiting to a greater extent by experience, than are the lower forms of life. And here is the mystery that has no solution: we came out of the burning nebulae just as our horse and dog, but why we are men and they are still horse and dog, we owe to some Power, or shall I say, to the chance working of a multitude of powers, that are beyond our ken. That some Being willed it,

54. Time and Change, p. 177.

55. Ibid., p. 177.

56. Under the Maples, p. 213.

designed it, no: yet it was in some way provided for in the constitution of the world."

To many of us the unique powers of man, which gave rise to Burroughs's reflective and philosophical thought regarding his origin and destiny, are a matter of course. Like some other blessings, notwithstanding their importance, they are, because of their universality, as a rule unnoticed. Not so, with Burroughs. He thought much of man's physical, mental, and spiritual characteristics and their significance in the general scheme of things. Physically, aside from his upright posture, man's most distinguishing feature is his chin.

57"None of the orders below him," he says, "seem to have what can strictly be called a chin."

The thing of all things, however, which puts man in a class by himself is his consciousness. 58"Only in the higher forms of animal life," Burroughs states, "is the cosmic mind supplemented by conscious, individual intelligence. There are occasional gleams of this intelligence in the lives of the lower animals, but not till we reach man does the spark become a flame." The psychic fact of a state of consciousness was as great a mystery to Burroughs as was the origin of vitality or the evolution of man from the animal world. 59"Mind, or mental states," science told him, "is only a name for complex physico-chemical processes in the brain substance." 60"But what is it?"

57. Time and Change, p. 31.

58. The Summit of the Years, p. 145.

59. Under the Apple-Trees, p. 136.

60. Ibid., p. 136.

he asks, "that names these processes?" He recognized the psychic world as just as much a fact as the world of matter and energy; for, he reasoned, ⁶¹"because the first fact is consciousness of self, it is that which recognizes the world of matter and energy. The I is the pillar that upholds the very heavens. ... But to what extent, if any, it is independent of matter and energy, or has been in the past, or may be in the future, is a question."

However he came by his superior mind, man must use it if he wishes to advance his happiness, his welfare, his civilization; and however much nature has apparently favored man, says Burroughs, she compels him to work out his own salvation, try his wit against her "blind forces." These forces are neither for nor against him; they are neutral. Against the suffering and death incident to conflict with them, ⁶²"there is no insurance save in the wit of man himself. All this has been developed and sharpened by much waste and suffering. We learn to deal with difficulties through the discipline of the difficulties themselves." Of all the animals, it is man, alone, who ⁶³"masters and makes servants of the inorganic forces, and thus rules the world below him." In another place, Burroughs comments on the fact that all we do is by our discovery of nature's laws and our utilization of her methods. ⁶⁴"We improve our minds and our souls as we improve the fields: we

61. Under the Apple-Trees, p. 137.

62. Under the Maples, p. 215

63. Is Nature Beneficent? Yale Review, Jan., 1921.

64. Accepting the Universe, p. 81.

make them more fair and fertile, but we do not eliminate Nature; with her own weapons, we improve our relations to her. ... We improve her fruits, her flowers, her animals -- that is, make them more serviceable to us -- by means of the hold we have upon her methods. We add nothing; we utilize what she has placed within our reach. All of which means that we are Nature's."

For his superior development, Burroughs says, man has to pay a price. The biological rule of might has had to give way to the development of equity, justice, and fair play. Man's lower impulses, -- his fear, cunning, anger, treachery, and greed -- he brought with him from his animal ancestors.

65"His moral and his spiritual nature, his altruism, his veneration, his religious emotions, his aesthetic perceptions," came to him as man. The rule of might still prevails in the world of matter and lower forms of life, even as it long prevailed in pre-human and human history. But a new biological law, based on man's moral nature, "the source of right, justice, and mercy," has slowly developed. 66"The progress of the race and of the nation's is coming, more and more, to depend upon the observance of this law. Without it, there is no organization, no co-operation, no commerce, no government. Without it, anarchy would rule and our civilization would crumble and society disintegrate."

65. Time and Change, p. 30.

66. Accepting the Universe, p. 141.

In his thought regarding Nature, the earth, and man, Burroughs did not omit the question of the duration of life on earth and of man's possibly limited cycle. Since nothing in the universe was made especially for man; since Nature's ways are not man's ways, her ends not those of man; since the earth was millions of years without man; since space is strewn with dead worlds and dead suns, with worlds too hot or too cold for life, what assurance have we that our earth will not in the course of long, geologic ages become "dead" or unsuited to life? The world, he says, ⁶⁷"was aeons before we were here, and will be other aeons after we are gone, yea, after the whole race of man is gone." Again he writes: ⁶⁸"He (man) appeared upon the stage when the play had advanced to a certain point, and he will disappear from the stage when the play has reached another point, and the great drama go on, without him." Yet matter will not disappear. ⁶⁹"Man," he avers in another place, "appears in due course and has his little day upon the earth, but that day must as surely come to an end. Yet can we conceive of the end of the physical order? the end of gravity? or cohesion? The air may disappear, the water may disappear, combustion may cease; but oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen, and carbon will continue somewhere."

67. Time and Change, p. 267.

68. Birds and Poets, p. 43

69. The Breath of Life, p. 268.

In the discussion of Burroughs's beliefs regarding Nature, the laws of Nature, the origin of vitality, and the evolution of man, the writer has attempted not only to give his life-long convictions and ultimate beliefs, but also to show that he felt, with our present knowledge, no entirely satisfactory conclusions can be reached. He quoted Tyndall as recognizing "the mystery and the miracle of vitality," and personally felt the limitations of the mechanico-physical explanation of life. His "logical powers," he admitted, accepted in full the scope of evolution, but the great gulf between man and the lower animals was at times baffling to him and led him into new research and speculation. Always, however, he would return to the scientific hypothesis as being more in harmony with the immutable laws of Nature than were the theological cosmogony and certain systems of philosophy. The references to his writings regarding these important problems (important because one's opinion upon them determines one's outlook upon life here and hereafter) have purposely covered a wide range. Passages from Birds and Poets, ⁷⁰published in 1877, from his posthumous work Under the Maples, published in 1921, together with various books between these two extremes, have shown a development, on the whole, thoroughly consistent.

Now, when a great naturalist has been before his country for decades, writing not only on nature, as such, but philosophizing upon his observations and the discoveries of science in relation to nature and to man's life, it is to be

70. Appendix II, This Study, pp. 57-58.

expected that critics, both favorable and adverse to his philosophy, will sit in judgment upon him. In a previous part of this ⁷¹study, we have shown that high tribute has been given to the work of John Burroughs. Here, we shall examine rather a different type of criticism: not praise entirely, not simple, frank disagreement, but criticism more or less hostile and vituperative in its antagonism; criticism which, in the opinion of the writer of this paper, is not interpretive of Burroughs's real position. First, after an apparently superficial survey of Burroughs's work before and after his acquaintance in 1911, with Henri Bergson's Creative Evolution, his critic flails him for his spirit of devout wonder before the mysteries of the universe. He also discovers a new note in his work, quite inconsistent, he states, with the spirit of rationalism which dominated his thought before Bergson's influence, namely, "spiritual insight" and a tendency to accept ⁷²"the validity of intuitive rather than scientific perception." A few years later this same critic, in discussing, among others of Burroughs's works, his Light of Day, published in 1900, said ⁷³"The light of day is reason, the scientific reason, which dominated Burroughs persistently, if not steadily, the rest of his life. In most of the fifteen volumes that follow this book, he appears in the role of an unimportant scientist and scientific sage, widely read, to be sure, but essentially commonplace. ... His distinction was not intellectual, aesthetic, or religious; it was poetic, ... poetic sensibility to

71. Above, pp. 46-48.

72. Foerster, North American Review, v. 212: pp. 670-677.

73. Foerster, The Sat. Rev. of Lit., Jan. 30, 1926, p. 524.

nature, harmonized with close observation of nature. It is this Burroughs which flourished in the three decades preceding the year 1900." But, he says, Whitman's influence "deflected Burroughs from the poetic vein that dominated his first nature book. ... Instead of the unconscious poetry that suffused his early work, Burroughs offered, in increasing quantities, meditations on the perfection of the universe. Although these meditations in his later years were filled with the scientific and rationalistic mood of his age, they continued to be filled also with the special kind of optimism that permeates the work of Walt Whitman."

A comparison of these two writings from the same hand, at an interval of less than six years, reveals that inconsistency is not confined to Burroughs. Time often moderates the harshness of our judgments; sometimes it endows us with new understanding. Hence, we should not experience undue surprise that, in the opinion of this critic, as of 1920, Burroughs had faced about from the ground of the rationalist to that of the intuitionist in his work subsequent to 1911; but that, according to this same critic in 1926, he was, during the period of time following 1900 "for the rest of his life" dominated by scientific reason, and the works of his later years "filled with the scientific and rationalistic mood of his age." With proper allowance for the eccentricities of genius, however, there is one point in this criticism that appears more original than verifiable. When did the field of poetry cease to be harmonious with the "intellectual, aesthetic, or religious"?

Yet these qualities, Burroughs's critic tells us, do not constitute his "distinction;" it was "poetic." Then another point in this criticism is a bit puzzling. How can all of Burroughs's most distinctive work have been done "in the three decades preceding 1900," at which time he was in the closest and most friendly relations with Whitman -- more strongly under his influence as a young writer than as a mature one -- and yet this poet be adjudged as having "deflected" Burroughs from his rightful poetic field into one to which he was ill adapted, although, according to his critic, he did not engage in these scientific writings until eight years after Whitman's death? Possibly it was a case of deferred influence; possibly not.

One saving expression distinguishes this second criticism -- "if not steadily." The scientific spirit "dominated Burroughs persistently, if not steadily, the rest of his life." All of his life would more accurately state the matter. Burroughs, as will be shown in the next chapter, was of a highly religious spirit; but he was equally rationalistic in all his thought, testing all premises in the last analysis with "Is it true?" The lack of "steadiness" with which the scientific light gleamed is not especially discernible if one read entire volumes rather than isolated passages or pages of his work. It is true that after reading Bergson's Creative Evolution during the summer of 1911, Burroughs for several years, was, at times, more or less under the spell of his philosophy. Nearing the end of his life, with his thought turning toward the beyond -- whatever it was to be -- for a time, he felt that

in Bergson's philosophy there existed a means of discernment beyond the reach of scientific processes. We find passages to this effect in Time and Change and in The Summit of the Years, but many more showing that, if possibilities lay in this direction, he could finally accept nothing that conflicted with the laws of Nature.

The books which have excited most comment regarding his supposedly new position are The Breath of Life and Under the Apple Trees, in the latter of which he has an essay on Bergson entitled "The Prophet of the Soul" In the preface to the Breath of Life, he writes, in part: ⁷⁴"As life nears its end with me, I find myself meditating more and more upon the mystery of its nature and origin, yet without the least hope that I can find out the ways of the Eternal in this or in any other world. ... In the following pages, I am aware that two ideas, or principles, struggle in my mind for mastery. One is the idea of the super-mechanical and the super-chemical character of living things; the other is the idea of the supremacy and universality of what we call natural law. The first probably springs from my inborn idealism and literary habit of mind; the second from my love of nature and my scientific bent. ... It is the working of these two different ideas in my mind that seems to give rise to obvious contradictions that crop out here and there throughout this volume." The ⁷⁵"Wordsworthian sense in Nature of 'something far more deeply interfused' than the principles of exact science," is, he says, the source of much of the book. Tyndall, man of science, he acknowledges as

74. Breath of Life, v - vi.

75. Breath of Life, vii.

a strong influence, through the effect of his phrase, "the mystery and the miracle of vitality."

In the book proper, he shows wide familiarity with the thought of many famous men of science and philosophy: Haeckel, Gifford, Verworm, Darwin, Spencer, Tyndall, distant Lucretius, Helmholtz; Professors Loeb, Rand, Conn, Herderson, Thompson, LeDantec, to select a few at random as illustrative of the range of his research. Bergson and Sir Oliver Lodge, he refers to frequently, with apparent joy in their "idealistic, extra-scientific" theories. But, as suggested above, he cannot long, if at all, forget his scientific faith, or affinity, or deep-seated tendency of his nature -- whatever it is that invariably attracts him, in his conclusions, to the tenets of science. ⁷⁶"The naturalist," he writes near the close of the volume, "cannot get away from the natural order; and he sees man, and all other forms of life as an integral part of it -- the order, which in inert matter is automatic and fateful, and which in living matter is prophetic and undeterminate; ... man has taken his chances in the clash of blind matter, and in the warfare of living forms. He has been the pet of no god, the favorite of no power on earth or in heaven. He is one of the fruits of the great cosmic tree, and is subject to the same hazards and failures as the fruit of all other trees. ... How can we separate man from the total system of things, setting him upon one side and them upon another; making the relation of

76. *Breath of Life*, pp. 258 - 259.

the two mechanical or accidental? It is only in thought, or in obedience to some creed or philosophy, that we do it."

In Under the Apple Trees, we see the same dual investigation and speculation, with the same ultimate reactions, as in the Breath of Life. It impresses one as a checking up of his own beliefs; a trying of them in the light of a philosophy repellent as a rule but now temporarily fascinating, only to find at last that his own philosophy contained the true gold. But in his essay on Bergson he writes of him as ⁷⁷"an inspired man," who "begets in us that inward joy and exultation which is the gift alone of a 'prophet of the soul.'" This proved to be the swan song, so far as the Bergson influence was concerned. One's nature, after a long life of discipline along its natural, innate tendency, seldom undergoes a permanent, radical change. In his last group of essays, he wrote: ⁷⁸"I am trying again to read Bergson's 'Creative Evolution,' with poor success. When I recall now I was taken with the work ten or more years ago, ... I am wondering if my mind has become too old and feeble to take it in. But I do not have such difficulties with any other of my favorite authors. Bergson's work now seems to me a mixture of two things that won't mix -- metaphysics and natural science. It is full of word-splitting and conjuring with terms ... The style is wonderful, but the logic is not strong. He enlarges upon the inability of the intellect to understand or grasp Life. The

⁷⁷. Under the Apple Trees, p. 226.

⁷⁸. The Last Harvest, p. 264.

reason is baffled, but sympathy and the emotional nature and the intuitions grasp the mystery. This may be true, the heart often knows what the head does not; but is it not the intellect that tells us so?"

If more were needed to show the transiency of the Bergson influence, we might find it in the fact that his name was not included in the list of ⁷⁹"My Men," which he handed his literary executrix in the last year of his life. They were men, it will be recalled, to whom he felt deeply indebted for some definite and permanent influence in the shaping and development of his life and thought. As for the alleged inconsistency, I believe that we may justly conclude that, after a reading of Burroughs's works in their entirety, we shall find, as have other readers, a ⁸⁰"beautiful illustration of the continuity, the oneness, of this singularly simple life, ... of how the vigor of his youth steadies into a maturity of strength with age."

In sharp contrast to the assertion that his scientific writings are ⁸¹"essentially commonplace," is the opinion of another critic, Brander Matthews, writing of Time and Change: ⁸²"In these pellucid pages -- so easy to read because they are the result of hard thinking -- he brings home to us what is the real meaning of the discoveries and the theories

79. This Study, p. 26

80. SHARPE, Seer of Slabsides, p. 15.

81. This Study, p. 90.

82. Our Friend John Burroughs. (quoted) p. 2.

of the scientists. ... He brings to bear his searching, scientific curiosity and his sympathetic, interpreting imagination. ... All of them models of the essay at its best -- easy unpedantic, and unfailingly interesting." This, in the opinion of the writer, is eminently fair criticism and represents the reaction of the great majority of Burroughs's readers.

4

The Ideal of Fidelity in Treating Nature

Burroughs was concerned in ascertaining and interpreting the truth, not only in his scientific and philosophical writings, but also in all that he wrote about Nature. Peaceful and serene, as a rule, lover of quiet, the one thing which could arouse him to active protest, almost militant warfare, against any person or group of persons, was his belief that they were flouting the truth, grossly misrepresenting Nature. His own fidelity in reporting his observations is one of the charms of his Nature descriptions. We feel his truth and sincerity in every page. Not that he confines himself to the mere chronicling of facts; rather, he adds his own impressions of what he observes and the semi-philosophical thoughts arising out of the experience. Is there aught but truth in the following, and yet who but a careful observer, one familiar with bees and their ways, as well as the plant life of his woods, could have written it? ⁸³"The honey-bee goes forth from the hive in spring like the dove from Noah's

83. Locusts and Wild Honey, pp. 1-2.

ark, and it is not till after many days that she brings back the olive leaf, which in this case is a pellet of golden pollen upon each hip, usually obtained from the alder or swamp willow. ... When a bee brings pollen into the hive, he advances to the cell in which it is to be deposited and kicks it off, as one might his overalls or rubber boots, making one foot help the other; then he walks off without ever looking behind him; another bee, one of the indoor hands, comes along and rams it down with his head and packs in into the cell."

One familiar with his nature essays need not be told how basic he considered "sharp eyes" and accurate observation in all writings on nature. ⁸⁴"The habit of observation, " he writes, "is the habit of clear and decisive gazing. Not by a first casual glance, but by a steady, deliberate aim of the eye, are the rare and characteristic things discovered. You must look intently, and hold your eye firmly to the spot, to see more than do the rank and file of mankind." Accompanying keen gazing, there must be an ability to "separate, discriminate." This, Burroughs tells us, ⁸⁵"is just as necessary to the naturalist as to the artist or the poet." Observation and something else -- the Burroughs that appealed even to harsh critics of his science and philosophy -- are in these lines: ⁸⁶"I have been a seeker of trout from my boyhood; and on all the expeditions in which this fish has been the ostensible purpose, I have brought home more game than my creel showed. In fact, in my mature years,

84. Locusts and Wild Honey, pp. 44.

85. Ibid., p. 44-5.

86. Ibid., p. 93.

I find I got more of nature into me, more of the woods, the wild, nearer to bird and beast, while threading my native streams for trout, than in almost any other way. It furnished the excuse to go forth; it pitched one in the right key; it sent one through the fat and marrowy places of field and wood. Then the fisherman has a harmless, preoccupied look; he is a kind of vagrant that nothing fears. He blends himself with the trees and shadows. All his approaches are gentle and indirect. He times himself to the meandering, soliloquizing stream; its impulse hears him along. ... The birds know he has no designs on them, and the animals see that his mind is on the creek."

We have mentioned before Burroughs's dislike of the ⁸⁷laboratory method in the study of animal life. He admitted that it had its place in science, particularly in the study of medicine. It was the general use of it by schools, for their nature-study courses, to which he most strongly objected. People who had no intention of pursuing scientific courses later were given laboratory courses in high schools and in early years of college, without the field work, which, he felt so keenly, would give a more faithful knowledge of the living world of nature and inspire a love for it. ⁸⁸"The laboratory study on the animal mind," he wrote, "is, within its proper limits, worthy of all respect; but you can no more get at a complete animal psychology by this method than you can get at

87. This Study, p. 59.

88. Summit of the Years, p. 191.

the beauty and character and natural history of a tree by studying a cross section of its trunk or one of its branches. You may get at the anatomy and cell-structure of the tree by this means, but will not the real tree escape you? A little may be learned of the science of animal behavior in the laboratory, but the main, the illuminating things can be learned only from observation of the free mind." To see things as they truly were, was the burden of his thought on nature study.

Another phase of the laboratory method, as sometimes pursued, and one from which his heart shrank, was the incidental cruelty to the subject animals. Much as he loved truth, there was a limit to which we should pursue it. ⁸⁹"Beyond a certain point in our culture," he said, "exact knowledge counts for much less than sympathy, love, and appreciation. ... We may know an animal in the light of all the many tests that laboratory experimentation throws upon it, and yet not really know it at all. We are not content to know what the animal knows naturally; we want to know what it knows unnaturally. We put it through a sort of inquisitorial torment in the laboratory, "starving it, burning it, freezing it, electrocuting it, vivisectioning it, ... "to find out something about its habits or its mental processes that is usually not worth knowing."

¶ During the early years of this century, Burroughs entered into his well-known contest with certain nature writers, whom he designated as "Nature romancers" and "nature fakers," because of their misrepresentation of the facts of animal life and the

⁸⁹. Summit of the Years, p. 57.

animal mind. He wrote many papers on "real and sham" natural history, the animal mind, and animal behavior for our leading magazines before he finally won his battle. ⁹⁰President Roosevelt, famous scientists, and other naturalists and explorers in the field of wild animal life came to the assistance of Burroughs in his courageous fight for the faithful representation of natural history facts. The nature romancers had their friends, and many were the abusive letters that were showered upon Burroughs during the controversy. His son says, however, that ⁹¹"checking up the statements of the nature fakers" but sharpened his father's own power of observation and made him more alert. The battle was waged over whether animals possessed reason, consciousness, humor, ability to plan and execute, as man does, or whether many of their acts, commonly attributed to these qualities, are in reality, instinctive. Burroughs believed that, though man had climbed from animal origin, he had ⁹²"pulled the ladder up after him;" that his reason and his consciousness were utterly beyond animal reach; and that there could be no reason without thought and judgment. ⁹³"the thorough student of animal life" he wrote, knows that animals do not reason or have any mental concepts; that one can train them to form habits, but cannot develop their intelligence; that is, that they can be trained, but cannot be educated. He knows they have no self-consciousness, from such a field observation as this: song-birds with a defective instrument will sing as constantly and joyously, even ecstatically, as the

90. Life and Letters, v. II, pp. 50-58.

91. My Boyhood, p. 240.

92. Leaf and Tendrill, p. 165.

93. Summit of the Years, p. 193.

perfect-voiced songsters."

Burroughs relates an incident of a chipmunk about Woodchuck Lodge, which, apparently, exercised reason and judgment in storing up food for the winter, but in reality was acting instinctively. ⁹⁴"He acted as if he knew that the green corn and the choke-cherries would spoil in this underground retreat, and that the hard, dry kind and the cherry pits would keep. He did know it, but not as you and I know it, by experience; he knew it, as all the wild creatures know how to get on in the world, by the wisdom that pervades nature, and is much older than we or they are."

These illustrations might be extended indefinitely, for there is, as indicated above, paper after paper on the powers and limitations of animals and birds, in the wild and as modified by contact with man. But lack of space forbids. One more point, however, should be noted. The controversy was instituted by Burroughs, as was said, because he believed in accurate observation and reporting of animal life. It had another side in which he was much concerned. Shall we put nature romancing into the hands of our youth as nature fact? ⁹⁵"A great many intelligent persons," he wrote, "tolerate or encourage our fake natural history on the ground that they find it entertaining, and that it interests the school-children in the wild life about them. Is the truth, then, without value for its own sake? What would these good people think of a

94. Under the Apple-Trees, p. 9.

95. Leaf and Tendril, p. 103.

United States school history that took the same liberties with facts that certain of our nature writers do?"

He won his fight. His principle of truth prevailed. We still have nature romancing and probably always shall have. But it is not, in common practice, represented as nature fact. If at times it should be, the public is now alert to the distinction between natural-history fiction and natural-history fact.

Not only this insistence upon truth in nature writings, do we owe to Burroughs; his interest in the truths of science and his writings thereon have added greatly to the common interest and knowledge. Faithful in his research, faithful in his writings, he believed in applying the truths of science to our daily problems. For of what benefit were these truths if they added not to the consistency and happiness of our lives?

Furthermore, there could be no true happiness, he said, without a knowledge of science. For to science we are indebted for all our exact knowledge of the physical universe and our relations to it: of the heavens above us, their orbs, and the cosmic processes going on there; of the earth beneath our feet, and its structure, its composition, its physical history; and our own origin as a part of this universe. 96

"The whole material fabric of our civilization, we owe to science. Our relation to the physical side of things concerns us intimately; it is for our behoof to understand it. ... We have the gift of life, and life demands that we understand

96. Summit of the Years, p. 64.

things in their relation to our physical well-being." This was the spirit of his life and writings.

CHAPTER III

The Religious Thought of Burroughs

The Religious Thought of Burroughs

1

The Source of His Religious Belief

In the discussion of Burroughs's thought on nature and science, we have noted how the early influences of his life and his innate tendencies led to a certain consistent development. During the course of his long and fruitful life, concurrent with his observation of nature, he found time for research into the mysteries of science and philosophy. Through wide reading and deep thought, he not only tried out the principles which his logical faculties pronounced good and true, but looked into hypotheses, the appeal of which was to the spiritual side of his nature, and which in some respects seemed contrary to the laws of the visible universe. In the end, however, he invariably returned to his original and life-long position, basing all tenets upon his conviction that Nature is the embodiment of law; that the ¹sequence of cause and effect is inviolable; that the order of the physical universe is rational, and that our welfare and happiness consist in adjusting our lives and beliefs to this order of the universe.

As has been said before, Burroughs's ²religious philosophy had its source in his conception of the universe

1. This Study, p. 84.
2. Ibid., p. 83.

and the laws governing it. While, from year to year, he was increasing his knowledge of the physical universe and our relations to it, so also was he developing his perception of the spiritual side of life. It is to be expected that the religion of a naturalist, with what we might call an innate, basic tendency toward science, would be of a practical turn, founded upon law, upon the objective and verifiable, rather than upon the subjective and upon divine revelation. However, it was not without its idealistic and spiritual side. The Wordsworthian conception of the spiritual immanent in all phases of Nature, inorganic as well as living, appealed strongly to him and undoubtedly colored his beliefs; not, however, to the point of making them inharmonious with the principles of science. ³"Science enables us," he wrote during the last decade of his life, "to understand our own ignorance and limitations, and so puts us at our ease amid the splendors and mysteries of creation. We fear and tremble less, but we marvel and enjoy more. God, as our fathers conceived him, recedes, but law and order come to the front. The personal emotion fades, but the cosmic emotion brightens. We escape from the bondage of our old anthropomorphic views of creation, into the larger freedom of scientific faith."

In our search as to the possible influence of Burroughs's ancestry upon his literary gifts, we felt impelled to account for at least a portion of his genius on the theory

of ⁴variation from type. We might almost do the same in the matter of his religious philosophy. His parents, primitive Baptists, God-fearing people, believers in predestination, left no permanent mark of their beliefs upon the naturalist. They did not compel their children to attend church and Sunday School, since ⁵"they mustn't use any influence to warp the will of the Lord." They expected, Burroughs wrote years later, that the time would come when we children would be drawn to the church -- "that the Spirit would move us." Burroughs, however, was never able to accept the faith of his father and mother. As a boy, instead of the church, he preferred the woods and birds and those occasional experiences of ⁶high spiritual or emotional exultation which suddenly filled his soul in the presence of nature. Nevertheless, he appears early in his boyhood to have absorbed, as children will, some of his father's beliefs regarding a personal God of jealousy and revenge. He gives an amusing account of an experience with a playmate in a thunderstorm, and his surprise that the boy was not instantly killed for "making faces at the clouds." "But," he concludes, ⁷"I have long ceased to think that the Ruler of the storms sees or cares whether we make faces at the clouds or not. Do your work well, and make all the faces you please." Practical advice, though the "faces" we make be figurative, standing for our perplexities regarding the Unknown!

4. This Study, p. 8.

5. JOHNSON, John Burroughs Talks, p. 226.

6. This Study, p. 11.

7. My Boyhood, p. 113.

While this conclusion of Burroughs probably was reached years after the occurrence related, we may consider the experience as one of the initial incidents in his religious development. From that time on he was to feel, more and more, the need of close correlation between the truths of the natural world and one's religious beliefs.

2

His Philosophy of Religion

Religion, Burroughs tells us many times and in many ways, is a natural function of the human mind, among all peoples, in all countries, in all ages of the world. We should not look upon it as ⁸"something superadded from without, -- a unique and peculiar kind of life which was made possible by the life and death of Christ, and in no way possible before that event. ... The sentiment of religion is the same in all ages and lands, differing in its outward forms but not in its inward essence, just as the sentiment of patriotism or of loyalty is the same." Again he writes that ⁹religion in some form is as natural to man as are eating and sleeping; that in pre-historic days, the mysteries of life and the wonder and terror of the world in which man found himself, aroused emotions of awe, fear, and worship in him as soon as his powers of reflection were born. That is, religion, among all peoples, had its origin in the aspects of nature which were

8. Light of Day, p. 62.

9. Accepting the Universe, p. 107.

but partly understood, or entirely strange and mysterious, particularly manifestations of power, both kindly and awe-inspiring. He traces religions from the first early ¹⁰sun-worshippers -- worshippers of the splendor, power, and bounty of the sun -- down to the polytheism of the Greeks. The Greek, as well as the Roman, religion illustrated the tendency of man, under the influence of his developing and opening mind, to project himself -- his own ideal -- into the universe and worship that as symbolic of the force he felt behind visible nature. In fact, he tells us in another work,¹¹ "all religious and ethical systems grow out of our egoism. We plant ourselves in the middle of the universe and say that it is all for us. We make gods in our own image, we invent a heaven for the good and a hell for the wicked, and seek to keep down the brute within us by a system of rewards and punishments."

The fact that the cosmology of these early religions was all wrong did not prevent their filling a need in man's nature. Man's religious instincts and impulses, Burroughs affirms, have had in the past little to do with the truth or falsity of things, but have been just as keen in the presence of false gods as in the presence of the true. Furthermore, the fact that man was ever a religious being, does not indicate that he was always a moral being. ¹²"Indeed, he was a religious being before he was a moral being. He worshipped and offered sacrifices before he dealt justly and humanely with

10. Light of Day, p. 166.

11. Accepting the Universe, p. 81.

12. Leaf and Tendril, p. 281.

his fellow." And again, ¹³"He worships before he investigates; he builds temples before he builds schoolhouses or civic halls. He is of course superstitious long before he is scientific; he trembles before the supernatural long before he has mastered the natural."

A matter of interest to Burroughs was the difference in emphasis which, in Christian nations today, is placed upon religion, as compared to that placed on polytheism and other religions, of ancient days. In modern life, religion is becoming independent of the state, while in Greece, Rome, and Judea, the church and state were one. Festivals, public games, and even wars, bore a direct relation to some part of the ancient religion. The religious principle, even well into the Christian era, dominated everything -- ¹⁴"science, literature, the arts, the state, the nation, the individual." In modern life, however, the religious principle is one of two: the religious and the secular. Religion is relegated to sects and is aired once a week, the mass of modern life being secular. It is true that Great Britain still maintains, as do some other countries, the union of church and state; ¹⁵"but it is a forced and artificial union; it is a union and not a oneness, a matter of law and not of life, as in ancient times."

Burroughs believed that in evaluating the various religions, we should have a common test: Is it true? We test moral questions, he says, by an appeal to the moral sense, beauty by an appeal to the aesthetic sense, the truth of alleged statements by an appeal to the intellectual sense, or reason

13. Accepting the Universe, p. 107.

14. Light of Day, p. 111.

and judgment. ¹⁶"And there is no other court but this that can settle the truth or falsity of a proposition." But, he tells us, this is the question which it is not safe to ask of any religion, for there has been superstition in all forms. A much safer question would be ¹⁷"Is it saving? That is, does it hold men up to a higher standard of life and duty than they were otherwise capable of? Does it cheer and sustain them in their journey through this world?" According to the German historian of Greece, ¹⁸Dr. Curtius, Burroughs says, the religion of Apollo did all of this for its adherents. Nowhere was it introduced without transforming the entire lives of the people, liberating them from groveling forms of worship into one of moral elevation.

Today, nevertheless, each great religion is believed by its followers to be the only true religion. The Christian theologians, he reminds us, recognize, out of all the great historical religions of the world, but one that is true and of divine origin; ¹⁹"All of the rest were of human invention and for the most part mere masses of falsehood and superstition." But science, to the truths of which Burroughs continually gravitates, ²⁰"recognizes the religious instinct in man as a permanent part of his nature and looks upon the great systems of religion -- Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Mohammedanism, the polytheism of Greece, Rome, and Egypt, -- ... as its legitimate outgrowth and flowering, just as much

16. Light of Day, p. 146.

17. Light of Day, p. 16.

18. Ibid., p. 16.

19. Ibid., p. 15.

20. Ibid., p. 15.

as the different floras and faunas of the earth are the expression of one principle of organic life." We may treat all of these religions as true or as false, he continues; but our rule must be consistent. They are all false in their machinery; but they are all true in the recognition of a Power greater and wiser than ourselves, to whose laws we must conform our lives. Later, in pursuance of this thought, he asks: ²¹"How is a reasonable man to favor any scheme that rules out the religion of Plato and Zeno and Seneca and Epictetus and Cicero and Lucretius, or Spinoza, or of Darwin, as of no avail, as only snares of Satan?"

And what, we might ask, was Burroughs's definition of religion? In his book on religion, he wrote: ²²"Theology passes; religion as a sentiment or feeling of awe and reverence in the presence of the vastness and mystery of the universe, remains."

In speaking of the decay in religious beliefs today, he affirmed that it was rather a decay of creeds and dogmas than of the real spirit of religion. ²³"Religion, as love, as an aspiration after the highest good," will ever live. In the course of informal conversation, he remarked, ²⁴"The true lover of nature and of the good and beautiful is the truly religious man, and you have such in every church and outside of any church. ... It doesn't make you religious simply to have

21. Light of Day, p. 62.

22. Ibid., p. viii.

23. Ibid., p. lll.

24. Johnson, John Burroughs Talks, p. 235.

a definite notion of heaven and hell. ... If you can't return good for evil, it's a mockery to call yourself a Christian.

... It's the love of truth and the doing to others as we would be done by that we should aspire to. That is Christ. Religion is life -- not something apart from the person who has it."

Then, toward the end of life, his Journal shows this entry:

25"Joy in the universe, and keen curiosity about it all -- that has been my religion. As I grow old, my joy and my interest in it increase. Less and less does the world of men interest me; more and more do my thoughts run to things universal and everlasting."

All in all, not a bad presentation of the spirit of religion and the enriching and practical part it must play in life. Not perhaps the formal definition of the creeds; but does it not breathe of reverence, of joy in the universe, of a heart athirst for knowledge, of aspiration for the highest good, of the golden commandment given by the world's greatest religious prophet and teacher? A few re-readings bring to one a sharp realization of the fact that it is no slight task to live up to the ideals set forth in these apparently simple, informal statements.

Holding this simple, natural religious belief, practical in all its aspects, Burroughs as a matter of course had little use for the doctrinal side of religion. To his mind, while theology had had its origin in the conditions of the times and the needs of the church in the early centuries

of its growth, it had most pathetically failed to progress with the thought and knowledge of the day. ²⁶"The doctrinal part of the popular Christianity, its supernaturalism," he wrote, "is an inheritance from the past as much as withhcraft or magic is." But in those days, he added, ²⁷it did not break with human knowledge, being in close harmony with the elements of the marvelous and exceptional which characterized much of the knowledge of the times. People then lacked our science, our conception of the course of human or natural events as being the result of immutable law. The personal point of view prevailed; everything revolved about man, and "superhuman beings took sides for or against him. ... The contemporaries of Jesus thought it not unreasonable that John the Baptist should come to life after his head had been cut off; that the prophet Elias should re-appear upon earth, or that Jeremiah should come back. These notions were in strict keeping with the belief in the marvelous and the supernatural that then possessed men's minds. The four Gospels were a growth out of this atmosphere, and the current theology is a continuation of the same faith in prodigies as opposed to natural occurrences." Indeed, he said, so far as science or a rational conception of things was concerned, the fathers of the church, the framers of its creed, were mere children. They were highly spiritual and moral, but lacked the knowledge which science revealed hundreds of years later. Naturally, they gave credence to things impossible of belief in the fuller light

26. Light of Day, p. 56.

27. Ibid., p. 53-58.

of today's knowledge.

It is but reasonable, Burroughs believes, to expect progress in religion from age to age. There has been progress in government, in statecraft, in law, in science, in art, and in medicine. ²⁸"In religion, the progress has been precisely like that in medicine -- from the arbitrary, the fantastic, to the simple and the natural; from the conception of a universe the sport and tool of supernatural beings, to a world inexorably bound by the sequence of cause and effect, or like that from the Ptolemaic astronomy to the Copernican system. That the early religions were fantastic and unreal needs no proof. That the Christian mythology is equally fantastic and unreal is not so generally admitted." Nevertheless, he sees signs of growth in our religious thought. True, he says, many ministers talk glibly of growth but fail to discern that growth and development entail some casting off of old beliefs. But there are others, who are trying to bring about accord between our scientific knowledge and our religious ideals. We can measure the progress that has been made by the ²⁹"writings and sermons of such men as Maurice, Campbell, Erskine, Kingsley, Stanley, Arnold, Robertson, Tullock, Maudsley, and others in Great Britain, and in those of Emerson, Parker, Hedge, and Mulford in this country -- a progress from the bondage of the letter of the law into the freedom of the spirit. When we think of what these men have said and done,

28. Light of Day, p. 7.

29. Ibid., p. 178.

we may look forward with some confidence, as Goethe did, to a time when "all of us by degrees will learn to elevate ourselves out of a Christianity of catechisms and creeds into a Christianity of pure sentiment and noble action."

Burroughs attached great importance to the deathbed of Tennyson, ³⁰"with a copy of ³¹Shakespeare in his hand instead of the Bible or Prayer Book, and with only his family and physician by his bedside. ... That a great poet in his last moments should seek to lean upon the spirit of another great poet, gone before, is natural enough; too natural, one would think, to suit the supernaturalists. ... It was a significant deathbed, science watching the body and literature ministering to the soul. Where the parish priest was, we are not told; men's thoughts in their last hours are turning less and less to him."

There are a number of tenets of the Christian faith, Burroughs believed, that we must eliminate if we desire the church, in the future, to attract thoughtful people as it has done in the past. We must make its creed harmonize with our present scientific knowledge. The principal doctrines which Burroughs holds utterly inconsistent with the scientific culture of the present day are: the conception of an anthropomorphic God and his opposing power, the Devil; the divine origin

30. Light of Day, p. 178.

31. As Tennyson lay dying, he had beside him a volume of Shakspeare open at the exquisite song from Cymbeline, "Fear no more the heat o' the sun."

of the Bible; the creation of the universe and of man as presented in Genesis; a closer relation between God and man formerly than is possible today; the fall of man, with the attendant plan of redemption through the vicarious atonement; the divinity of Christ, the virgin birth, and the Trinity; the miracles; the resurrection; an objective heaven and hell; and the necessity of the rite of baptism or the experience of "conversion" to admit one into participation in the joys and benefits of Christianity.

As we have shown in considering Burroughs's thought on Nature and science, he believed in a Power immanent in the world of nature. The exact character of this creative force, "the Eternal," he says, we have no way of determining; it is beyond understanding with our present knowledge. But our science has enlightened us sufficiently to make longer impossible a belief in dualism in nature: a personal God and a personal Devil, contending against each other in the universe. In fact, in the beneficence of Nature, there is no good and evil as it has been conceived in the past. ³²"Man is a part of the universe," he writes; "all that we call good in him, and all that we call bad, are a part of the universe. The God he worships is his own shadow cast upon the heavens, and the Devil he fears is his own shadow likewise. The divine is the human, magnified and exalted; the satanic is the human, magnified and debased." And yet, he says, in our fathers' scheme of things these two powers worked consistently.

32. Accepting the Universe, p.45.

33 "They invented or postulated two opposing and contending principles ... one divine, the other diabolical," God and Satan. "Their conception of God would not allow them to saddle all the evil and misery of the world upon him; they had to look for a scapegoat, and they found him in the Devil. One is just as necessary to a consistent cosmogony as the other. If we must have an all-wise, all-merciful, all powerful, all-loving God -- the author of all good and the contemner of all evil -- we must also have a god of the opposite type, the great mischief-maker and enemy of human happiness ... the author of all that hinders and defeats the reign of the perfect good. Without the conception of the Devil, we are forced to the conclusion, either that God is not omnipotent, or that he is responsible for all the sin and suffering in the world. ... Wrestle with the problem as we may, we are impaled on one or the other horn of the dilemma. Our traditional God is more cruel and more indifferent to human suffering than any tyrant that ever gloated over human blood and agony, or else is fearfully limited in his power for good. With a Devil at our disposal to whom we can impute the ills of life, the situation clears up, and God emerges, shorn of his omnipotence, it is true, but still the symbol of goodness and love."

To Burroughs, however, this is an absurd contradiction to what he observes in Nature and to what science has uncovered in the rocks of the earth and glimpsed in the Heavens above. He says that when he looks into the starry heavens

and reflects on what he sees there, his mind staggers before the stupendousness of it. It is impossible to conceive of a Being who could create it. He is not observing "the works of God" but is fact to face with a power that baffles speech; ³⁴"No lineaments of personality, no human traits, but an energy upon whose currents solar systems are but bubbles. In the presence of it, man and the race of man are less than motes in the air."

Furthermore, to think of the Eternal in terms of our experience, to visualize this Power in concrete form, not only involves us in contradictions, but places us, with all our twentieth century knowledge, on a plane with the ancients. The only difference is that they had many deities, most of whom possessed ignoble human traits more strongly marked than any in our conception of God, while we have but one God. The gods of the Greeks, Burroughs thinks, ³⁵were the most beautiful and interesting of all, being conceived by rarely skillful artists. The old Hebrews, while much less artists, were greater as prophets; "hence Jehovah, the God of the Hebrew Scriptures, is the most awful, the most imposing, and the most imminent of all gods. How cruel, how terrible, how jealous -- a magnified and heaven-filling despot and king." And the most enlightened Christian nations have retained this old Hebraic conception of God, though they have modified his character to that of a Father, after the advent of "the gentle and loving intermediary in the form of Jesus Christ."

34. Light of Day, p. 164 —

35. Ibid., pp. 166-67.

As man became more merciful, he unconsciously conceived of a more benevolent and merciful God. ³⁶"The God of our Puritan fathers will not do for us at all. The moral difficulties of Calvinism are getting to be as insurmountable as the intellectual difficulties of Catholicism. The God of today, or the divine ideal towards which the religious conscience of our time is struggling, one may feel some liking for; but the God of the Puritans, of Calvinism, was ... too terrible to contemplate." And the Devil, Burroughs adds, ³⁷"has lost his prestige and is much discredited. As a power in men's minds, his reign is over; and hell, his headquarters, no longer casts its lurid light upon human life."

Burroughs realized the difficulty to many people in substituting an impersonal Power for the age-old conception of a personal God, because it is only personality that we can worship. ³⁸"This is why," he writes, "science has put such a damper upon us; it banishes personality ... from the universe. The thunder is no longer the voice of God, the earth is no longer his footstool. Personality appears only in man; the universe is not inhuman, but unhuman. It is this discovery we recoil from and blame science for; and until, in the process of time, we shall have adjusted our minds, and especially our emotions, to it, mankind will still recoil from it." But until we do make this adjustment, Burroughs believes the universe will be a puzzle to us. It but deepens the mystery of

36. Light of Day, p. 131.

37. Accepting the Universe, p. 39.

38. Time and Change. p. 180.

the unknown to set up over the universe a Being, no matter how powerful, to whom we assign human motives and purposes. Even granting the existence of a Devil, life's ills are still a mystery. Why, we ask on the death of a good man, should one of the Master's ³⁹"most useful servants" be taken and "so many worthless and worse than worthless ones" be spared? How much more in accord with the beneficence of Nature, how much more comforting, Burroughs affirms, to believe with Emerson that the Nature Providence is ⁴⁰"broad and impartial" in the "administration of the world for the general good, not for particular profit." When we talk about the ⁴¹"fatherhood of God, his loving solicitude, we talk in parables. There is not even the shadow of analogy between the wholesale bounty of nature and the care and providence of a human father; ... there is no special act of love or mercy or guidance, but a providence like the rains, the sunshine, the seasons."

By some, Burroughs has been called a pantheist in his conception of the universe. He uses the term, pantheism, a few times, to represent the idea of an all-pervading, spiritual force, immanent in the various manifestations of the Universe. To conceive of God and Nature as two realities would be but another form of dualism -- a Creator apart from his universe. ⁴²"God is Nature, or Nature is God. If this is pantheism, then we are in good company, for Goethe said that as a philosopher, he was a pantheist. Even the atheist

39. Light of Day, p. 169.

40. Accepting the Universe, p. 7.

41. Is Nature Beneficent? Yale Review, Jan., 1921

42. Accepting the Universe, P. 201.

has a god of his own. He knows there is something back of him greater than he is.

"Most persons are pantheists without knowing it. Ask any of the good orthodox folk what God is, and they will say that He is a spirit. Ask them where He is, and they will answer, He is here, there, everywhere, in you, and in me. And this is pantheism -- all god -- cosmotheism." To this extent, he was a pantheist.

In the same volume from which the passage above was taken, he later avers: ⁴³"It seems to me that there is no other adequate solution of the total problem of life and nature than what is called 'pantheism,' which identifies mind and matter, finite and Infinite, and sees in all these diverse manifestations one absolute being. As Emerson truly says, pantheism does not belittle God; it magnifies him. God becomes the one and only ultimate fact that fills the universe, and from which we can no more be estranged than we can be estranged from gravitation."

Burroughs has various expressions in his writings for this invisible but consciously-felt Power in the universe, which some of us call Nature, and some of us call God. He spoke of it as the Nature Providence; a beneficent Power; a Force immanent in all things; Creative Energy; the Eternal; the Cosmos, frequently; oftenest, perhaps, simply as Nature. Nature, ⁴⁴"the Eternal, the unspeakable, the unseeable, the

43. Accepting the Universe, p. 271.

44. Ibid., pp. 14-15.

unthinkable, and yet the most obvious fact that life yields us ... the great Reality in which we live and move and have our being. ... Turn your back upon it; then turn your back on gravity, upon air, upon light." ⁴⁵"This is the God," he tells us, writing similarly in another chapter, "that science and reason reveal to us -- the God we touch with our hands, see with our eyes, hear with our ears, and from whom there is no escape -- a God we serve and please by our works and not by our words; whose worship is deeds, and whose justification is in adjusting ourselves to his laws and availing ourselves of his bounty; a God who is indeed from everlasting to everlasting."

The Bible was one of Burroughs's much-read books. He loved its literature, its poetry, its high moral and ethical teachings, its inspiring influence; but he did not regard it as of Divine origin. With his conception of the universe and the Power back of it, or rather immanent in it, no book could be of Divine authorship. He could not agree with theologians that while every other book in the world was written by a human being, ⁴⁶"the Bible was an exception and was the word of God, himself, uttered through inspired men; that while other books might be more or less fallible and imperfect, the Bible was infallible in every respect. Science saw in the Bible but one of the great sacred books of the nations -- ⁴⁷" undoubtedly the greatest of them all -- but

45. *Accepting the Universe*, p. 190.

46. *Light of Day*, p. 17.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

still a book, or collection of books, embodying the history, the ideas, the religious wants and yearnings of a very peculiar people -- a people without a vestige of science, but with the tie of race and the aspiration after God stronger than in any other people -- a people still wandering in the wilderness and rejected by the Nations to whom they gave Christianity."

Burroughs believed, however, that we must not value the Bible simply for what it has of literal, outward truth. Its history might not all be true, its cosmology might be entirely unscientific, it might contain the myths and superstitions of its times; ⁴⁸"and yet," he avers, "the vital, essential truth of the Bible is untouched. Its morals, its ethics, its poetry are forever true." ... It is the "great deep of the religious sentiment, the primordial ocean. ... What storms of conscience sweep over it; what upreaching, what mutterings of wrath, what tenderness and sublimity, what darkness and terror are in this book! What pearls of wisdom it holds, what gems of poetry! Verily, the Spirit of the Eternal moves upon it! Whether then there be a personal God or not, whether our aspirations after immortality are well founded or not, yet the Bible is such an expression of the awe, and reverence, and yearning of the human soul in the presence of the facts of life and death, and the power and mystery of the world, as pales all other expressions of these things,"

The reaction of Burroughs to the Biblical account of the Creation of the world and of man needs little discussion.

48. Light of Day, p. 41.

It is exactly what we should expect from one holding his view s of nature and science: the unity of nature, her immutable laws of cause and effect, the common origin of all life and matter, the evolution of man, and the inconceivably long cycles of time involved. For the book of Genesis of the Bible, science, he writes, has ⁴⁹substituted the book of the genesis of the rocky scripture of the globe -- a book torn and mutilated, that has been through fire and flood and earthquake shock, that has been in the sea and on the heights, and that only the paleontologist can read or decipher correctly, but which is a veritable bible of the succession of life on the earth. The events of the days of creation are recorded here, but they are days of such length that they are to be reckoned only in millions of years."

The supposition that there was a time in the infancy of the world when God appeared in human form, walking and talking with man, was, to Burroughs, simply one more bit of evidence of the mythology and superstition attendant upon the inception of the Hebrew religion, the same as upon that of all other religions. He could not conceive of the relations between the God of the Universe and man being radically different in a former period of history from those existing now. ⁵⁰"Is it probable," he asks, "that man's relation to the air, the water, the earth, has ever been any more intimate and vital than ... now? If God is not a constant and invariable power, he is nothing. Does gravity intermit? Are not the celestial bodies

49. Time and Change, p. 175.

50. Light of Day, p. 201.

always on time? Are not life and death and generations always subject to the same laws? The moral and religious nature of man rises and sinks; he seems more conscious of God and of divine things in some periods of history than in others, in some races than in others, but this is a fluctuation doubtless governed by natural causes ... and is not the result of any change of plan or purpose of the Eternal. God walked and talked with men in the patriarchal days because men interpreted their own thoughts, dreams, desires, motions, as the voice of God."

The Christian doctrine of the fall of man and his redemption through the sacrifice of an innocent Being, was, to Burroughs, out of keeping with the physical world and the morals and conscience of man today. In the light of evolution to conceive of a first man, is impossible; in the light of justice, to conceive of the mythical sin of that first man as affecting the welfare of all posterity, is equally impossible. 51 "Do we not know ... that man's course has been upward and not downward; that his 'fall' was, in fact, development into a higher state of being?" Again, 52 "The whole scheme hinges upon the fall of Adam in paradise as an historical event, an act of disobedience on the part of the original progenitor of the human family, in consequence of which sin and death entered the world, and the suffering and death of Jesus became necessary to bring about a reconciliation between an angry God and rebellious man; with the attendant doctrine of the mystery of

51. Accepting the Universe, p. 263.

52. Light of Day, pp. 59-60.

of the atonement, of salvation by grace. ... Now, this conception as science, as a rational explanation of the world as it is and of man's salvation, is on a par with Cosmas's theory of the earth with the sky glued to the outer edges. It is the working of the same type of mind; it rests upon the same arbitrary and artificial view of things."

In contrast to this, Burroughs says that Nature befriends and furthers all men, in all ages, when they obey her laws but crushes all those who cross her ways -- an impartial administration of the laws of cause and effect. ⁵³"Science knows no other plan of redemption than the survival of the fittest, knows no other day of creation than this day, knows no other fall of man save the present daily fall of ignorance and vice, knows no heaven or hell save that we make for ourselves, knows no immortality save the persistence of life and force, and finally knows no God save the Infinite Power that fills and upholds all things. "

With reference to the Trinity, the virgin birth, and the divinity of Christ, Burroughs, as in all things else, bases his belief upon the laws of the natural world. The theory of the Trinity, he disposes of briefly. ⁵⁴"I never speculated about the Trinity. I always looked on that as a puzzle men made for themselves and then worked out the solution as best they could." As to the virgin birth, it violated natural laws and hence was an impossibility. ⁵⁵"Science affirms that every

53. Light of Day, p. 125.

54. Johnson, John Burroughs Talks, p. 231.

55. Light of Day, p. 17.

child born of woman since the world began belonged to the human species and had an earthly father; theology affirms that this is true of every child but one: one child, born in Judea over eighteen hundred years ago, was an exception , was indeed very God himself."

In reply to the defense that since there are exceptions known to science, the virgin birth might be regarded as one, Burroughs states that an exception, to be recognized by science, must be general to a class -- not to one individual, only. ⁵⁶"A child born of a woman, but without an earthly father, and of a superhuman species, is the kind of exception which ... science cannot recognize. ... Science, as well as experience, finds exceptions to general rules everywhere; but these exceptions are constant and as strictly the result of natural law as anything else." But though science denies the birth of Jesus as being exceptional to all known law, it recognizes him as a great teacher and prophet and as the Savior of men. Not, Burroughs tells us, by virtue of a contract made in the "Council of the Trinity;" but by his ⁵⁷"unique and tremendous announcement of the law of love, and the daily illustration of it in his life. Salvation by Jesus is salvation by self-renunciation, and by gentleness, mercy, charity, purity, and by all the divine qualities he illustrated. He saves us when we are like him, -- as devoted to principle, as self-sacrificing. His life and death do inspire in mankind these things: fill them with this noble ideal. He was a soul impressed,

56. Light of Day, pp. 46-47.

57. Ibid., p. 17.

as perhaps no other soul ever had been, with the oneness of men and God, and that the kingdom of heaven is not a place, but a state of mind."

The supposed miracles of Jesus, as well as his resurrection from the dead, Burroughs believes are but other instances of reports, inconsistent with natural law. While science has never proved that miracles or supernatural events are impossible, it gives us a conception of a ⁵⁸"universe which finds no place for these things. It discloses a harmony and a completeness which leaves no room for alien and extraneous forces. ... There is a growing conviction in the human mind today that the forces of nature are constant and adequate to all the phenomena of the visible world, and that there is no room ... for the introduction of forces extra-natural. Akin to this, ... is the feeling that any system of religion to be credible must be in line with the rest of our knowledge."

Some of the alleged miracles, Burroughs admits, might be possible and within natural law. The healing of the sick by act of faith agrees with what we know of many human ailments today, principally diseases of the mind and nervous system. Such afflictions have yielded in recent times to an act of faith or to an unwonted mental resolution. ⁵⁹"But the remedy, he says, "is subjective and not objective. The virtue is not in the hem of the garment touched, but in the effort of the will of the person who touched it." The stories of the New Testament which are at variance with our subsequent

58. Light of Day, pp.125-126.

59. Ibid., p. 66.

experience, arose naturally ⁶⁰" in a superstitious age around the person and teaching of such a transcendent being as Jesus was, -- the notion that he was more than human, that he had no earthly father, that he had some superhuman control over the forces of nature, that he rose from the dead, that his death bore some mysterious relation to the sins of the world."

Replying to the assertion that the resurrection of Christ is as well established as any event of ancient history, Burroughs says we must approach the matter in the impartial spirit of science, and evaluate the evidence and the character of the witnesses -- as to whether they were credulous or incredulous, imaginative or realistic; we must consider the fact that there has never before or since been a resurrection, that this one violates natural law and is contrary to all human experience, that the authority on which we are asked to believe it consists of a book or books of uncertain date and authorship, written by people who did not profess to be eye-witnesses of the events described; and, as an alleged historical, physical fact, we must note the current beliefs, expectation, superstitions, and imperfect knowledge of the day, as well as their probable influence on the Gospel narrative. With regard to these matters, ⁶¹"We see," he affirms, "here in the Gospel writings a belief in angels, or supernatural human beings, and in demoniacal possessions cropping out. Has the subsequent experience of mankind confirmed or dissipated the belief in these things? We see in Matthew's narrative the belief that

60. Light of Day, p. 66.

61. Ibid., p. 80.

the dead sometimes come forth from their graves and walk abroad and appear to men, and that they choose darkness rather than light; we see the belief that dead saints and worthy persons may come back to earth, and we see everywhere an unquestioning belief in the reality of what we call miracles, or physical results brought about by other than physical means. Do these things agree with the rest of our knowledge? If not, is the proof of them commensurate with their exceptional character?"

Possibly the answer to this question is obvious, but Burroughs adds this: ⁶²"The demonstrations of science no competent mind can resist, but the demonstrations of religion, its proofs, evidences, ... only impress such minds as have already taken the leap which faith requires."

From Burrough's love for the earth and his exalted joy in its being a ⁶³star of Heaven, in the Heavens now -- we readily see the foundation of his belief regarding the supposed objective Heaven of the future which nearly all religions of mankind, as well as the Christian, have held in some form or other. If Burroughs could not accept the supernatural character of Jesus, he could and did regard him as the world's greatest religious teacher and prophet. He looked upon many of his affirmations, though highly spiritual in character, as revealing new possibilities about our life on earth, rather than referring to existence in some distant and mythical better land of the future world. "The kingdom of Heaven is within you" meant exactly what it said. ⁶⁴"Jesus,"

⁶². Light of Day, p. 65.

⁶³. This Study, pp. 78-79.

⁶⁴. Light of Day, p. 65.

he wrote, " is as free from any theological bias as a child is from metaphysics. He taught one thing; namely, that the kingdom of Heaven is in the condition of the heart, a condition illustrated in his own life." Again,⁶⁵ "There will never be any more creation than there is now, nor any more miracles, or glories, or wonders, or immortality, or judgment days, than there are now. And we shall never be nearer God and spiritual and transcendent things than we are now."

With regard to the heaven of golden streets and pearly gates, he comments: ⁶⁶"Christendom has not yet succeeded in making its heaven attractive; that is, attractive to the intellect or to the faculties that find their fulfillment in this world. We have to imagine ourselves differently constituted beings to see any joy in it; not merely beings of a higher spiritual capacity but beings fundamentally different." Still again, later in life, he wrote: ⁶⁷"Until science opened our eyes, we did not know that the celestial and the terrestrial are one, and that we are already in the heavens among the stars." And finally, near the end of his days, he reiterates his belief in Heaven's lying about us, not only in our infancy, but now and always: ⁶⁸"Our religion is at fault, our saints have betrayed us, our theologians have blackened and defaced our earthly temple, and swapped it off for cloud mansions in the Land of Nowhere. The heavens embrace us always; the far-off is here, close at hand; the ground under your door-stone is a part of the morning star. If

65. Leaf and Tendril, p. 212.

66. Light of Day, p. 158.

67. Breath of Life, p. 262.

68. Accepting the Universe, p. 53.

we could ... see ourselves and our world in perspective and as a part of the celestial order, we could cease to weep and wail over our prosaic existence."

To Burroughs, a belief in the necessity of baptism as a saving grace, held by the Catholic branch of Christianity and by many sects of the Protestant branch, as well as the matter of conversion, deemed vital as a means of salvation by numerous sects of Protestantism, was simply incomprehensible. In fact, he thinks it very strange that we should ⁶⁹"crave a creed or a belief that goes outside of our experimental knowledge; that is independent of it, not subject to its tests and limitations; something afar off and irrational and inexplicable, and beyond the reach of time and change. Who is the philosopher", he asks, "that said we are guided by our common sense in everything but our religious beliefs?" It is the various systems of theology, or creeds, he makes clear time and again, to which he objects and not to the teachings of Jesus. ⁷⁰"The teachings of Jesus himself were simple and natural in the extreme, but out of the notions that formed about Jesus there grew up a religious organization which was equally the extreme of complexity and artificiality. For seventeen hundred years, mankind was under its sway as under a nightmare. It perverted nearly every natural fact and paralyzed every instinct of the heart." Again, ⁷¹"The vast and elaborate system of theology which grew out of his parables and Orientalism", overshadowing the world ... and begetting some of the darkest crimes in history, "is as far from His spir-

69. Accepting the Universe, p. 254.

70. Light of Day, p. 8.

71. Light of Day, p. 65.

it and that of His disciples as east is from the west." And in another chapter, he adds that ⁷²"Religion as dogma has drenched the world in blood; as a sentiment, it has refined and elevated the race."

In regard to conversion, Burroughs held that it was an emotional, subjective experience, quite impossible to many natures. It was an upheaval of conscience, though not a turning over of the mind nor a real opening of the eyes. Any apparent change in the nature was due to the enlisting of the heart and feelings. ⁷³"It begat love. Love is not sharp-sighted, but it is creative; it finds meaning and value which an outsider does not find. A man who loves his church and its sacraments and ceremonies finds a significance and an importance in them which another does not. But it is to be remembered that these things are relative and personal, and not absolute and universal. It is love which creates them, our own heightened feelings which impart them. They are subjective phenomena, and not objective realities." Since he believed conversion to be a subjective, or psychological, experience -- and far from a universal one -- Burroughs held it out of place as an essential part of any religion.

Baptism, he looked at in the same way. As a symbol in the minds of people for something they hold sacred, it was quite a different thing from declaring it a prerequisite to salvation.

72. Ibid., p. 139.

73. Ibid., p. 216.

He was shocked and horrified at the belief of some churches that innocent little babies, who died without the rite of baptism, were lost souls. To him who does not believe ⁷⁴"that when water from the hands of a priest falls upon the head of an unconscious infant, a miraculous change is wrought in its spiritual nature ... by which it becomes essentially a new and a higher being", one church, so Burroughs affirms, says, "Let him be accursed!" And in the same book, relative to this subject of infant baptism, he writes: ⁷⁵"In a city near me, there is a large cemetery, in a neglected corner of which is a multitude of children's graves which have the appearance of being outcasts, reprobates; and so they are. These children were not baptized; therefore they cannot be buried in consecrated ground; their blameless little souls are in hell, and their bodies are huddled together here in this neglected corner." Burroughs averred time and again that he was no reformer, but a man of peace who loved the Eternal, the Cosmos, and the majestic working out of Nature's ways. This gruesome picture, however, and the parental suffering implied by it, aroused his indignation as few things did. It was the extreme exemplification of a heartless dogma. From it, he turned to the largeness of Nature's bounty -- free, impartial, universal. He could attempt to adjust himself to Nature, but not to man-made creeds.

However, not in all churches, were creeds carried out to the utmost letter of the law. People are growing, he says, especially in America, more liberal. And despite the numerous,

74. Light of Day, p. 61.

75. Ibid., p. 174.

contradictory creeds, we find rare Christian virtues blossoming in characters whose religious beliefs are in many respects diametrically opposed. ⁷⁶ "What noble and beautiful lives have been lived by people of just opposite religious creeds! A man's creed, in our day, at least, seems to affect his life little more than the clothes he wears." If it were possible to eliminate from our creeds, beliefs inconsistent with our knowledge, Burroughs thinks there would be far fewer so-called skeptics in the world. ⁷⁷ "It adds vastly to the credibility of a doctrine or theory to find that it fits in with other things, that it is not an exception or an isolated circumstance but is in line with facts and principles of the truth of which we are already assured." He applies this principle to the "theory of Christianity as popularly held", and shows that it is because certain theories of Christianity are not so commonly accepted by the reason as are the laws of nature, that there are "doubters" in the world. He compares the theory of the "vicarious atonement" to embryology, demonstrating how the former harmonizes less with our common knowledge and "our sense of the fitness of creation" than does the latter. ... "It is because these things have no such warrant and basis, no such agreement with our perception of the order of the world, that doubters and skeptics exist; it is because they break completely with all the rest of our knowledge of creation."

Life, death, immortality, as a possible sequence in our existence, have been universally conceived of just as some form of religion has been believed in by all peoples in all ages. The picture of our immortal existence, and of Heaven, has varied

76. Leaf and Tendril, p. 251.

77. Light of Day, pp. 51 -- 52.

among the different religions. The exact nature of the imagined future will ever remain a mystery, Burroughs says, which humanity has no means of solving. Life, we know, death is the universal experience; and then -- the unknown. But this ⁷⁸"future is just as secure for us all as is the past. A moment between two eternities, is life; a spark that draws a brief line upon the darkness and is gone."

And what is death? Our fathers ⁷⁹"taught it as a penal infliction introduced into the world on account of the sin of Adam;" but "the natural philosopher has always taught 'that death is a law, and not a punishment.'" In another book, Burroughs says, ⁸⁰"When the metabolism of the body ceases, death comes. Do we think of life, or the organizing principle, as then leaving the body? It ceases; but does it leave the body in any other sense than that the flame leaves the candle when it is blown out? And is this any different in the case of man than it is in the case of a tree or a dog? We postulate what we call a soul in man, which we deny to all other forms of life -- an independent entity which separates from the body and lives after it. But we run into difficulties the moment we do so. In the biologic history of man, when and where did the soul appear? Did the men of the old Stone Age, ... the Piltdown man, ... the Neanderthal man, the Java man of Du Bois, have it? Did our ancestral forms still lower down have it?"

Burroughs tells us that in his youth he often heard old people speak of death as "paying the debt to nature." Their idea

78. Accepting the Universe, p. 287.

79. Light of Day, p. 58.

80. Accepting the Universe, po. 181 -- 2.

seemed to be that since life had indebted them for the earth, the air, the water, the elements of their bodies and powers of their minds, the time would come when they must "settle the account." But they always fancied the debt was for the body alone -- that something would be left over. ⁸¹"Will not then", he asks, "the universal mind that pervades Nature claim its own also? Can you and I hope to remain detached from it forever? ... Be assured, that no particle of soul or body can be lost. But processes may cease; the flame of the lamp may go out, and the sum total of force and matter remain the same. . . . We are links in an endless cycle of change in which we cannot separate the material from what we call the spiritual."

Again, in regard to the retention of our own personality after death, Burroughs said that ⁸²"Identity is a thought, a concept, of our minds, and not a property of our minds." Still again, ⁸³"Men reason upon the subject of the soul's immortality, but the answer which reason gives is mainly in the negative. There is nothing that could be called evidence that man continues to live after the dissolution of the body."

When one faces the great mystery, himself, or when one loses friends or relatives, if any alteration in his convictions upon personal immortality be possible, it will be at these times. On the Sunday of Emerson's burial, Burroughs devoted the day to "meditations upon our beloved master", the outcome of which was his tribute to Emerson, entitled "Emerson's Burial Day".

81. Accepting the Universe, pp. 282 -- 83.

82. Light of Day, p. 170.

83. Ibid., p. 87.

84 "The spell called living is broken," he wrote. "And does the real living now begin? We do not, and can never know." On the death of his father, whom he loved deeply, regardless of their temperamental differences, he said: 85 "Well, we shall meet again: our dust in the earth, and the forces that make up our spirits in the eternity of force. Shall we know each other then? Ah! shall we? As like knows like in nature. I dare not say farther than that." After several weeks of numbing grief over the death of Whitman, Burroughs wrote a friend -- 86 "I have not his (Whitman's) faith in immortality and cannot have. Some people are born with faith, some achieve faith, and some have faith thrust upon them. What faith I have, I must earn by the sweat of my brow, and that is very little. In some moods, I lean strongly upon my great friend and find comfort in his unconquerable belief in immortality. In other moods, death seems a blank. We are simply sponged off the blackboard of existence, and the great Demonstrator goes on with new figures and new problems. We exist in his thought -- is that enough?"

One evening toward the end of his life, Dr. Barrus tells us that, in speaking of immortality, Burroughs remarked: 87 "It is hard to face this question unflinchingly. We cherish the hope for our friends and ourselves, but I can see no grounds for the belief. Let us face the probability with what courage we can. ... Perhaps if men would face this question more courageously, they would stop prating about 'the better world,' and live more worthily here -- would stop 'fixin' to begin to get ready to live,'

84. Life and Letters, v.I, p. 236.

85. Ibid., v. I, p. 264.

86. Ibid., v. I, p. 324.

87. Ibid., v. II, p. 269.

and really live, here and now. Nothing more divine can ever come from the Eternal than this world that the theologians so despise. It is a pretty good world -- I want no better." A little later, quoting from Thoreau, 'The mind of the universe which we share', he said this is "a large and sane idea", and supplements the thought with these words: ⁸⁸"Our mental lives flow from the fountain of universal mind, the Cosmic intelligence. ... It is this primal current of life, the two phases of which we see in our bodies and in our minds, that continues after our own special embodiments of it have ceased; in it is the real immortality. The universal mind does not die, the universal life does not go out. ... And though the life and mentality of the globe passes (sic) daily and is (sic) daily renewed, the primal source of those things is as abounding as ever. It is not you and I that are immortal; it is Creative Energy, of which we are a part. Our immortality is swallowed up in this."

In this same volume, he said that Emerson never committed himself to a belief in immortality as it is usually understood -- ⁸⁹"continued existence in another world" -- but that he read and praised Marshall, who suggested that it would be "suicidal of Nature not to preserve all that she has perfected in man." "Whitman," he adds, "and probably thoughtful men in all ages, have asked the question, 'Is Nature a suicide?'" Burroughs thinks, however, that this question is prompted by our own ideas of economy. Gain and loss are nothing to Nature, as

88. *Accepting the Universe*, pp. 109 -- 110.

89. *Ibid.*, p. 242.

all is hers. All Time is hers, and is without beginning or end. ⁹⁰"Dead worlds and burnt-out suns scattered through side-real space" are but like "boulders in a New England field". She was "millions of years in bring ing man out of the earth, -- the end and flower of her whole scheme from our point of view, -- and probably in far less time he will have disappeared from the earth". To the finite, it may be suicide; but to Nature there is no exhaustion. "She can repeat the process continuously. Only the unlimited is inexhaustible. The infinite goes on forever."

All of these reasons against immortality are in absolute agreement with Burroughs's conception of the physical universe and its impartial, unchanging laws. As a part of the Cosmos -- the universal elements and energy -- man must not expect exceptional treatment even in the, to him, vital matter of personal immortality. We must not mistake concepts of our minds for properties of the mind, not expect an immunity for the mind, or soul, which does not extend to the physical. Neither can we prove our belief in immortality on the supposition that it is suicidal on the part of Nature not to preserve man -- "the end and flower of her whole scheme" -- for to her there is no loss and no gain. All is hers, and her resources and processes are inexhaustible and unlimited. In one of his last essays, "Facing the Mystery" (the final one, as published, in his second and last posthumous volume of essays), he expresses thoughts consistent with his lifelong beliefs. He would be glad of some authoritative

90. Accepting the Universe, p. 243.

assurance of personal immortality. He says he admires Whitman's indomitable faith but cannot share it. He knows he is part of the Cosmos and as such will persist. But since Nature has the "original stuff of myriads of souls," why should she conserve his individually? Then, as he had written in substance many times before, he reiterates that this he knows: ⁹¹"The grave is not dark or cold to the dead, but only to the living. The light of the eye, the warmth of the body, still exist undiminished in the universe, but in other relations, under other forms. ... You and I perish, but something goes out, or may go out, from us that will help forward a higher type of manhood. To what end? Who knows? We cannot cross-question the Infinite. Something in the universe has eventuated in man, and something has profited by his ameliorations. We must regard him as a legitimate product, and we must look upon death as a legitimate part of the great cycle -- an evil only from our temporary and personal point of view, but a good from the point of view of the whole."

There are many people, nevertheless, who honestly believe that in all matters pertaining to religion, the soul, or immortality, we should not look to reason as our guide. Instead, we should expect through faith, prayer, and spiritual insight, to be given light. Farroughs considered this proposition as, though attractive and favorable to our preconceived notions, not logical nor true. He thought it very

91. The Last Harvest, p. 287.

doubtful that spiritual insight was any different from any other form of insight; for ⁹²"insight," he said, "was the power to penetrate into hidden forces and meanings, to get at the true inwardness of things." He admitted that there was a difference in minds: the logical, reasoning mind; the imaginative, poetic mind; and the fervid, religious mind. "But," he continued, "is not the faculty with which we determine the truth or falsity of a proposition the same in all cases? A thing cannot be false to the intellect and true to what we call the soul or the heart, nor vice versa. The intellect may not see what the heart feels, but the heart is blind; and the mind alone can supply it with eyes. There is no more unsafe guide in our search for truth than our feelings or our attractions and repulsions."

To the remark of a religious teacher, that his "belief in a future life" convinced him that "conscious intelligence may exist without bodies," Burroughs replied: ⁹³"There! ... it is his 'belief' that 'convinces' him. ... All reasonable things are to be apprehended by reason alone." ... The statement that "a reasonable proposition is first apprehended by some faculty besides reason and then brought home to the latter, is like saying that a visible object can be seen by something other than the eye." It is another example of subjective proof. Time and again, Burroughs insists on a distinction between ⁹⁴"objective and subjective truth; between a statement or proposition which rests upon outward,

92. Light of Day, p. 214.

93. Ibid., p. 141.

94. Ibid., p. 86.

independent, logical evidence, and is addressed to the reason and the understanding, and one which is purely personal and subjective, involving the taste, the emotions, the hopes, the aspirations, and which is true or false according to the temper and experience of the person to whom it is addressed." All objective truth is capable of being communicated and verified, he said, and warned against the great wrongs which have originated in delusive, inward promptings, or subjective convictions, utterly incapable of proof. Men, he said, have heard inward voices inciting them to crimes against humanity, as in the burning of witches and heretics, and the mortifying of their own bodies. ⁹⁵"Good men and wise men have been equally sure, upon subjective evidence, of the existence of a devil; they have heard his promptings, his suggestions, and they have fought against him." But these are all subjective phenomena to which the man desirous of exact knowledge, can attach little weight.

Faith, like spiritual insight, has its limitations in the fact of Nature's truths. It, too, is subjective and incapable of logical proof. ⁹⁶"It seems to me," Burroughs said, "that the essence of religious faith is that it is independent of proof, and, at most, rests upon ... a degree of probability. Faith proper begins where reason ends; where reason avails, we have no need of faith: where there is a bridge, we do not need to take a leap." This, he averred,

95. Light of Day, p. 110.

96. Ibid., p. 71.

was not confusing faith with credulity, as some have claimed. 97 "Credulity is quite a different thing. Credulity may be defined as a belief without proof in matters where proof is demanded and is within reach. Faith is belief without proof in matters where proof is impossible." Man cannot today, he said at another time 98 "humble his reason before faith, as good Sir Thomas Browne boasted he could," by believing "not only above but contrary to reason and against the argument of our own proper senses." No such extreme illustration of faith is possible. Furthermore, Burroughs does not believe that, in the light of our present-day, scientific, natural revelations, thoughtful people will continue to depend upon superstition and subjective phenomena as the source of their religion. What he calls the 99 "modernness of religion," is coming, he avows, to more and more minds. Revelation, miracles, signs, wonders, conversing with God, Garden of Eden, fall of Adam, ministering angels, or thunder on Sinai, never existed more than now. "In fact, these things are not historical events, but inward experiences and perceptions perpetually renewed or typified in the growth of the race. This is the modern gospel ... the one vital and formative religious thought." This belief obviates dualism in nature, opposition between God and the world, harmonizes religious belief and natural knowledge. "What we hope for, what we aspire to, must be consistent with what we know. Faith and science must, indeed,

97. Light of Day, p. 71.

98. Ibid., p. 107.

99. Ibid., p. 51.

go hand in hand."

It would be out of harmony with Burroughs's other religious beliefs for him to expect a direct answer to prayer. If there be any value in prayer, he said, it consists in the purifying and uplifting of our own minds as a result of an earnest and upright attitude during the time of prayer. In all of the great wars and struggles of humanity, there have been about as many devout, earnest souls on one side of the conflict as on the other, all praying to the same God for victory. The prayers of both factions could not be answered. The Eternal ¹⁰⁰"is on the side of the righteous only when the righteous live according to the rule of Nature or rightness, or in harmony with the external order. And he is against the unrighteous when they transgress this order. In vain do we pray for victory on the eve of battle, except insofar as prayer puts courage into our hearts. Victory is for him who marshalls the physical and moral forces the most skillfully."

Again, in writing of prayer, Burroughs says that while there is no moral law in Nature, there is that out of which the moral law arose. He expresses his belief in the benefits of prayer as arising out of the act of praying, ¹⁰¹"There is no answer to prayer in the heavens above, or in the earth beneath, except insofar as the attitude of sincere prayer is a prophecy of the good it pleads for. Prayer for peace of mind, for charity, for gratitude, for light, for courage, is answered in the sincere asking. Prayer for

100. Accepting the Universe, p. 273.

101. The Last Harvest, p. 233.

material good is often prayer against wind and tide, but wind and tide obey those who can rule them."

Why, Burroughs was sometimes asked, if so many of the tenets of Christianity are impossible and contrary to reason, has the Christian religion spread throughout Europe and much of the western world as it has done? Why has it ennobled so many lives and advanced civilization? In reply to these questions, Burroughs but reiterated former statements: Religion is a universal instinct. Other religions have likewise ¹⁰²grown and inspired people. The mere facts of the "moral evidences of Christianity," its "wonderful growth from obscure beginnings," its power to inspire noble lives, are not sufficient grounds for accepting tenets contrary to twentieth century knowledge. Nor can we say, he continued, that the ¹⁰³"European nations owe all to Christianity. What Christianity owes to the quality and spirit of the European races remains to be determined. Why did it not transform the Eastern peoples as well? Science has done more for the development of Western civilization in one hundred years than Christianity did in eighteen hundred." This may impress one at first as rather a sweeping statement; but reflection upon some of the dark pages of political, educational, and ecclesiastical history, may make impossible a denial of its truth.

102. Cf. Above, pp. 110-113.

103. Light of Day, p. 149.

We must remember, furthermore, Burroughs writes, that during those obscure beginnings of Christianity, its system of theology was not inconsistent with the common beliefs of the people. They had little or no science and accepted reports of supernatural phenomena without question. 104 "No race," he tells us, has ever been "lifted out of barbarism without the aid of supernatural machinery." Though the scientifically-minded, once lifted out of the ignorance of barbarism, he adds, are prone to discredit the machinery, the mass of mankind are slow to outgrow it. To them 105 "the miraculous element of Christianity still seems vital and of first importance. Discredit that, and you have discredited religion itself in their eyes. But not so with the philosopher, or with the man who is bent on seeing things exactly as they are."

Burroughs further says that it is in accordance with the rest of our knowledge to believe that the very "cloud of myths" in which the Christian religion arrived was a powerful aid in the establishment of its superior system of morals and ethnics. 106 "What a seal of authentication is put upon it by the myth of the resurrection of Jesus! How this fact stuns and overwhelms the ordinary mind! ... As a new cult founded upon reason alone, or as a natural religion alone, Christianity could not have coped with the supernatural religions that then possessed the world. Men's minds were not prepared for

104. Light of Day, p. 68.

105. Ibid., p. 68.

106. Ibid., pp. 68-69.

it, and it is probably equally true that the mass of mankind are not yet prepared for a religion based upon natural knowledge alone. But the time is surely coming, and natural science is to be the chief instrument in bringing it about."

Another reason for the growth of Christianity is in the very nature of the religious impulse. The religious mind, or the poetic, or the artistic, is not concerned with logical processes and reasons for things, Burroughs affirms, so much as with ¹⁰⁷"impressions, attractions, intuitions, emotional processes, the divine, the beautiful, the enjoyable." A poem, a work of art, literature, Paul's Epistles, the Sermon on the Mount, do not have to satisfy our sense of truth as does a proposition in science or a mathematical formula. If they are in some way satisfying, inspiring, nourishing to our aesthetic and moral natures, that is all many require. ¹⁰⁸"If Christianity really rested upon evidence, if its vitality was solely dependent upon verifiable facts and considerations, ... it would have perished long ago." Again, ¹⁰⁹"Christianity does not offer a system of philosophy, but a religious incentive." When it "attempts to interpret the universe or satisfy our rational faculties, its failure is pathetic; its proofs are childish; its science is essentially pagan; its story of the fall as an explanation of the origin of evil, and its plan of salvation as a means of escape from that evil, as science, do not rise above any of the delusions of the

107. *Light of Day*, p. 89.

108. *Ibid.*, p. 92.

109. *Ibid.*, pp. 93-94.

pagan world. The story of the Chaldee god, Bel, who cut off his own head, moistened the clay with his blood, and then made a man out of it, is just as rational an explanation of the origin of man as the one the Christian Church has always adhered to. In fact, the whole basis of our theology ... is essentially pagan and belongs to an order of things that has long passed away. The power of Christianity is a spiritual power; it is in its appeal to the ideal of the gentle, the merciful, the meek, the forgiving, the pure in heart, -- an ideal which has an attraction for the European nations; and also to the love of reward and the fear of punishment which materialistic ages foster. In one is its charm for fine natures; in the other its power over the multitude."

Burroughs says that the appeal which the Christian religion makes to different characters is similar to that of other religions in other days. He quotes from Gibbon the remark that the ¹¹⁰various modes of worship which prevailed in the ancient Roman world were all thought by the people to be equally true; by the philosophers, to be equally false; and by the magistrate, equally useful. ... "This", Burroughs comments, "is probably very much the case amid all nations, at all times." In another essay, he remarks that ¹¹¹"Goethe acutely said to let those who could not have literature or art or science, have religion."

Burroughs agrees with Goethe that the orthodox

110. Light of Day, p. 103.

111. Accepting the Universe, p. 264.

religion or something to take its place, is necessary to man's greatest good and happiness. He reflects on the many sturdy, God-fearing, church-going, simple folk he knew in his youth, with their impossible creeds but worthy lives. ¹¹²Cease all Christian effort, all organized Christian charities, all Christian enterprises in the fields of education, social betterment, ... amelioration of the masses, and our civilization would suffer." We must not overlook the fact that the old creeds "prepared the way for science and for the religion of Nature." That is, man's moral and spiritual nature demand the expression and experience afforded by religion, as now commonly accepted, or by the new comfort found in the religion of nature.

From time to time in Burroughs's books, we come across passages to this effect -- his belief that the idealistic, spiritual side of man's nature must be developed, as well as the practical, the knowing, the scientific. Man interprets the many different phases of his nature in his various activities. ¹¹³"In his art and literature, he bodies forth his own ideals; in his religion, he gives the measure of his awe and reverence and his aspirations toward the perfect good; in his science, he illustrates his capacity for logical order and for weighing evidence."

Burroughs sometimes feared a danger to our civilization from the very importance and far-reaching effects of our

112. Accepting the Universe, p. 264.

113. Ibid., p. 264.

scientific discoveries, our inventions, our progress in industrialism, and our unprecedented material prosperity. Knowledge, he says, is not sufficient to make happier, better, stronger people than were our fathers; life consists not only in our knowledge and possessions, but ¹¹⁴"in the things we love, in the depth and sincerity of our emotions, and in the elevation of our aspirations. ... Poetry and religion, so called, seem doomed to play less and less part in the life of the race in the future. We shall dream and aspire, but we shall not tremble and worship as in the past." Still later, he wrote that the term religion was an equivocal and much-abused word, but that he was convinced that no one's life was complete without some kind of emotional experience that might be called religious. ¹¹⁵"Not necessarily so much a definite creed and belief as an attraction and aspiration toward the Infinite, or a feeling of awe and reverence inspired by the contemplation of this wonderful and mysterious universe, something to lift a man above purely selfish and material ends, and open his soul to influences from the highest heavens of thought."

3

His Personal Religious Spirit.

A practical religion, a scientific religion, a spiritual religion, a religion of this life and this earth --

114. Time and Change, p. 180.

115. Accepting the Universe, p. 107.

a star in the heavens now -- constituted, in brief, the religion of John Burroughs, naturalist. A naturalist, but more than a naturalist, -- a man vitally interested not only in the great world of nature but in nature as related to man, and of which man is a part, though not the center of all nature's ends; interested in the Nature whose ways and ends are beyond the knowledge of the finite, but are revealed in part by the objective processes of science, rather than by divine revelation or other subjective processes; in Nature to whose laws we must adjust our lives if we would be happy and to whose embrace we shall finally be received in some form or other, as befits her broad, impartial beneficence. For Nature is beneficent, though her ways are not our ways, as yet, and though in many respects they are past our limited powers of comprehension; in the unending course of ages, Burroughs firmly believed, the ultimate results of her invariable, immutable laws are good.

Burroughs belonged to no church, accepted no creed. His creed, as he said, was the larger impartial creed of nature, the book of the revelations of the rocks. He read the Bible, however, as well as the book of Nature; not for its cosmogony, he tells us, but for its morals, its ethics, its poetry, which are "forever true." And where the religious Book and the theology which grew out of it in the past, did not square with the book of nature, as revealed by the objective proofs of science, he made no attempt to reconcile the two, to alter Nature's unalterable processes. It was not for

the one, the part, to try to substitute his personal opinions and wishes for the facts, the verifiable truths, of the cosmos. His task was to adjust his life, day by day, to Nature.

But however plainly and frankly he wrote against those parts of religious creeds which he held out of harmony with Nature and science, he denied any desire to ¹¹⁶"belittle or discredit the true Christian life of any man or woman, -- the life that conforms, however imperfectly, to the example set by Jesus of Nazareth." Yet believing in religion as a universal instinct, in a practical religion of life, founded upon Nature, and conforming rather, with the higher, purer ethics and more scientific knowledge of today than with the superstitions of the past; believing in religion as ¹¹⁷"a sentiment of awe and reverence in the presence of the vastness and mystery of the universe;" in a "religious sentiment that refines and elevates the race," he could not accept the principle that one's salvation is contingent upon his membership in and acceptance of the creed of any particular church. To be a Christian, in the larger sense, he contended, was to live a certain life, and not to subscribe to any particular creed. And as to one's "duty to God," he wrote: ¹¹⁸"I find that I have never been burdened by a sense of my duty to God. My duty to my fellow-men and to myself is plain enough, but the word is not adequate to express any relation I may hold to the

116. Light of Day, p. 37.

117. Above, p. 1/3.

118. Accepting the Universe, p. 50.

Eternal. Do I owe any duty to gravity, without which I could not move or lift my hand, or any duty to the sunshine or to the rains and the winds? ... My relation to the Eternal is not that of an inferior to a superior, or of a beneficiary to his benefactor, or of a subject to his king. It is that of the leaf to the branch, of the fruit to the tree, of the babe in the womb of its mother. It is a vital and an inevitable relation. It cannot be broken. It is not a matter of will or choice. We are embosomed in the Eternal Beneficence, whether we desire it or not."

Those words breathe of the heights and the depths of the true religious spirit. Indeed, one can read little of Burroughs without a consciousness of the fact that his personal spirit was a deeply religious one, -- religious in the presence of the truths of the Universe. He said that while some natures found comfort in the ceremonies and observances of the Church, for his part he did not need that sort of thing."

119 "Everyday is a Sabbath day to me. All pure water is holy water, and this earth is a celestial abode. It hath not entered into the mind of man to see and feel the wonders and the mysteries and the heavenly character of this world." Dr. Barrus tells us that much of his life he spent in ¹²⁰"communion with the All. He gave himself up to it, bathed his spirit in it, while keeping firm hold on the objective world. His double approach to Nature was that of one

119. Accepting the Universe, p. 263.

120. Life and Letters, v. II, p. 342.

'... who looks
In steadiness, who hath among least things,
An undersense of greatest; sees the parts
As parts, but with a feeling of the whole.'"

Was he a pantheist? If we must classify his faith in terms of the world's religions, pantheism, or, as he called it, ¹²¹"cosmotheism," most nearly coincides with his conception of a God of Spirit, a Power, immanent in all Nature, in whom man has his life and of which he is a part. ¹²²"Pantheism, he says, but identifies "mind and matter, finite and Infinite," and sees in all the diverse manifestations of Nature one absolute being. In accepting this, he cites a kindred belief on the part of Emerson, Goethe, and Thoreau, calling Thoreau's "The mind of the universe we share," a large and sane idea. Its similarity to the conception of Wordsworth -- one of "his men" -- is obvious. To whatsoever religious philosophy we might compare his belief, we cannot fail to recognize that it is founded on nature and science, is tested by reason and truth, and in character is highly idealistic and spiritual.

His religious philosophy was in no respect of a defeatist nature. Always hopeful and optimistic, he found life well worth living and this earth a joyous and beneficent place in which to live it. What matter a few unsolved problems: uncertainty as to the exact nature of God, of a possible

¹²¹. This Study, p. 123.

¹²². Ibid., p. 123.

future world? Though he earnestly sought a solution to these problems, especially in the latter years of his life, he well knew there was no answer. If, as he suggested, personal immortality was but a concept of our minds and not a property, a wish of the human heart rather than a reality, yet his faith in the beneficence of the universe was unshaken. All would be well. In some way, just as life was good, so would death, its "legitimate product," be ¹²³"a good from the point of view of the whole." And if there should be some other end to earthly life than the silence of the grave or re-absorption of the part into the life of the whole, the All, then the best possible preparation for it is not in the adherence to any special creed, but in living worthily, in returning good for evil, in entering while still on earth into those graces of mind and heart which give entrance into the kingdom of Heaven which may exist in each human life.

And what is the use of it all? Why surrender faith in the Christian belief of personal immortality for, at best, a belief in only the more general life of the whole? ¹²⁴"Where," Burroughs also asked, "is the comfort in all this for you and me?" He answers that there is none, save the satisfaction of knowing things as they are and distinguishing between substance and shadow. Truth! It is always truth which is of value to Burroughs, together with sincerity in the profession of it. We may win ¹²⁵victories for our descendants, he assures us,

123. This Study, p.

124. Accepting the Universe, p. 110.

125. Ibid., p. 111.

and bring the kingdom of heaven nearer for them by overcoming devils and evil spirits in facing the many perplexities of life and the false values and interpretations put upon things; by practising of the Christian virtues of soberness, meekness, reverence, charity, unselfishness, justice and mercy. As for personal immortality, time after time, he assures us that we must enlarge our visions and look past our own selfish, individual ends. ¹²⁶"The demand of our day," he affirms, "is for a scientific religion, an attitude of mind toward creation begotten by knowledge, in which fear, personal hopes, individual good, play little part. Virtuous actions, upright conduct, heroic character, the practice of the Golden Rule, are seen to be their own reward; and the security of the future is in well-doing and well-being in the present." Our fathers were faithful to the light as they conceived it. For those who have a spiritual belief based upon the light of a greater knowledge of nature and science, he urges a like consistency. ¹²⁷"Let us be as faithful to our day and generation as our fathers were to theirs."

And so he was. His religion was not a thing apart from his life but reflected the gracious charity, the happy spirit, the high aspirations, and deep sincerity of the man, as well as his unalterable faith in the goodness of Nature, the Eternal. As he wrote in his early manhood, so he believed all his life:

126. Accepting the Universe, p. 314.

127. Ibid., p. 265.

"The stars come nightly to the sky;
The tidal wave comes to the sea;
Nor time, nor space, nor deep, nor high,
Can keep my own away from me."

CHAPTER IV

Conclusion

Conclusion

John Burroughs was the friend of man. If proof of this were needed, we have but to look back over his life and work, and recall to mind the many people, great and unknown, from high positions of trust, from the fields of science and letters, or from more lowly walks in life, who have delighted in his books and his friendship, or who have journeyed from far and near to spend a few hours with him in the simple, serene atmosphere of Slabsides or Woodchuck Lodge. Or we may -- some of us -- remember our own feeling of personal loss -- we who had but read his books and had not had the good fortune of seeing and hearing him -- when the morning papers brought us the word of his death. Or we may recall the almost unanimous grief at his passing, together with the warm and high tributes of praise and appreciation of his work, when the great, kindly man ended his earthly adventure. For life to him was an adventure -- a joyous, daily search for new revelations at the hand of Nature, and keen happiness in sharing his discoveries with his friends. From the time, as a boy, when he brought his mother his first catch of speckled trout or his first gathering of wild strawberries or wild honey, down to the end of life when he left his friends a last courageous thought on the final great adventure into what must for all of us remain the Unknown, it was his joy to hunt for treasure -- wild honey from Nature -- under the guidance of science, to share with those not privileged or gifted to make the search.

He said he was no reformer, but a man of peace, who loved flowers, birds, people, and the quiet of Nature. He did not attempt to establish a new philosophy. His work was to interpret what he found in life, Nature, and science to others; and not in a didactic, arbitrary spirit, but in a spirit of good fellowship and love. ¹"If the world is any better for my having lived in it, it is because I have pointed the way to a sane and happy life on terms within the reach of all, in my love and joyous acceptance of the works of Nature about me. I have not tried, as the phrase goes, to lead my readers from Nature up to Nature's God, because I cannot separate the one from the other."

However, he had a message for us. Those who have read Burroughs (not merely his Nature books, delightful as they are; but also his scientific and philosophical essays) are not apt to remain indifferent to his utterance that Nature upholds and quickens both the physical and the spiritual in man. Not many of these readers will ever again nonchalantly, unthinkingly, without any mental reservations, accept a philosophy of life exactly as it has been handed down from the past, regardless of whether it be in harmony with the science, knowledge, and thought of their own day. We may, or may not, agree with Burroughs. But can we forget his often reiterated principle as to the unity of Nature, the universality and immutability of her laws, the inviolability of cause and effect, the rational order of the universe, her beneficence if we but adjust our ways to her ways?

1. The Last Harvest, p. 233.

Can we forget that he has "pointed the way" to a conception of Nature that ²"discloses a completeness and harmony which leaves no room for alien and extraneous forces;" that he believed the forces of nature to be constant and "adequate to the phenomena of the visible world," without the introduction of forces extra-natural? And whether we take the thought to heart or not, can we quite forget that "any system of religion to be credible must be in line with the rest of our knowledge," or the suggestion that we can make our lives and those of our descendants better by being as faithful to our day and generation as our fathers were to theirs? Or can we fail, in reaching our final conclusions, to consider that ³"a thing cannot be false to the intellect and true to what we call the soul or heart"? One thing every reader will remember as he looks at the heavens, is the exultant joy that Burroughs experienced in the fact that the earth was a star in the heavens; that the celestial and terrestrial were one; that always, everywhere, he felt the invisible presence of the Eternal "immanent in Nature" -- the divine in the common and near at hand. Perhaps he will remember that the kingdom of heaven may be found in this earth, in the condition of the heart, and that we save our lives through devotion to principle, through self-sacrifice, through deeds rather than words.

It is early yet to attempt a prediction as to the

2. This Study, p. 130.

3. This Study, p. 144.

place Burroughs's work will hold in the future thought and literature of the race. His nature writings and much of his literary criticism have been before the public years longer than has his philosophical thought. They have been pronounced good by naturalists and critics of literature and will very probably remain a permanent part of our literary heritage. His religious and philosophical essays were the work of his maturity, the result of long years of observation, reflection, and research. How essential they will be to the future thought of mankind, only time will reveal. That his religious philosophy will answer a need in the lives of many thoughtful, religiously-inclined people, who, as did he, wish harmony between their scientific knowledge and their religious belief, there can be no doubt. That it will be accepted gladly by a larger class of more conservative people, whose religious and aesthetic natures cling to the consolation of faith in a loving Heavenly Father, and who regard their religion as a thing apart from their science, as coming through divine revelation rather than by the processes of science, -- is greatly to be questioned. That it will bring comfort to the masses, the many with but moderate or little schooling, unanalytical, knowing little or nothing of science, prejudiced against the term evolution and without adequate conception of its meaning, believing firmly in the religion of their childhood, loving its very supernatural elements -- the primal essence of religion to their minds -- is, at present, impossible of belief. But time will tell.

Time, the great sifter, eventually separates the changing from the constant, the temporary from the abiding, the false from the true.

In general, it would seem probable that Burroughs's scientific thought and religious philosophy must influence, to some extent, the trend of man's future hopes and beliefs; for it undoubtedly reflects the desires and aspirations of an ever-increasing number of people. How far-reaching this influence will be cannot now be foretold. If new revelations of nature and science in a new "day and generation," among people with different aspirations and conditions of life, develop a radically different philosophy, Burroughs's thought will be displaced. If the results of his search for truth continue to be in accord with the highest human knowledge, will his philosophy not live? Truth lives. It was truth he sought and tried faithfully to give to others, even as he saw the light. Then, with a consciousness of his own fidelity to truth as he discerned it, and in deep serenity of spirit, he left the results to the All.

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